How well does social work education prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better?

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Abstract

A foundational purpose of the social work profession is the pursuit of social justice. From its beginnings social workers have worked with people living in poverty and experiencing injustice and social workers continue to do so. In Aotearoa New Zealand these people have eligibility for a range of welfare benefit entitlements. The Aotearoa New Zealand welfare benefit system has been subject to neoliberal reform and is judgmental, monocultural, punitive and complex. Without advocacy support people are unlikely to access all of their welfare benefit entitlements. It is therefore essential that social workers are highly knowledgeable about the welfare benefit system.

This research is an initial exploration of the role of social work education in preparing social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefit entitlements. It asks the question - how well does social work education prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better?

The researcher's positionality is seen as a resource. This research uses an epistemology of constructionism and a critical theoretical perspective. The methodology is based upon a critical ethnography that includes a political, social justice focus with an ethical obligation to bring about social change. A reflexive thematic analysis is used as it has the necessary flexibility to incorporate these components of research design. Eight semi-structured interviews of 'recent' social work graduates including the use of welfare benefit advocacy scenarios provide the research data along with a literature review, history of Aotearoa New Zealand's welfare benefit system and the implications of the professionalisation of social work.

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Definitions

The following definitions of benefit payments, government departments and agencies, and Māori words and terms are included as they are used by research participants and/or are used in this thesis.

Advocacy types

Collective advocacy: "people work together to advocate for systemic change to law and policy, and to reform the ways law and policy are put into practice" (Russell & Bradford, 2022, p. 12).

Individual advocacy: "advocates work with individuals and families to support them in accessing the resources and other assistance they need at the interface with government agencies and other service providers" (Russell & Bradford, 2022, p. 12).

Individual welfare benefit advocacy: a type of individual advocacy specific to working with individuals and families to access welfare benefit payments as specified by the Social Security Act 2018 and administered by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and Work and Income (W&I).

Welfare benefit advocacy: a type of collective advocacy with the purpose of achieving systemic change to the Social Security Act 2018 and the policies and practices of MSD and W&I. Welfare benefit advocacy when referred to in this research implicitly includes the practice of individual welfare benefit advocacy.

Welfare benefit payments

Accommodation Supplement (AS): a form of supplementary assistance paid to unemployed and employed people to assist with housing costs. For people in paid work their income will potentially limit the amount of AS paid or preclude eligibility. Eligibility for AS is also asset tested. The AS assists with housing costs including, rent and mortgage costs of the house the person is living in. If

the person is a homeowner then other costs including, rates, insurance and maintenance can be included in the eligibility assessment. Kāinga Ora housing tenants are not eligible for AS because they pay an income-related rent (Russell & Bradford, 2022; Stephens, 2019).

Advance payments: effectively a no-interest loan from Work and Income (W&I). These payments are made to unemployed people under the Ministerial Direction on Advance Payments of Instalments of Benefit and to people in paid work under the recoverable assistance programme (RAP). (Stephens, 2019; Work and Income, 2021, n.d.-a). An advance can be made to pay for "a particular and immediate need for an essential item or service" (Work and Income, 2021). This allows for discretion as to what W&I will assist with. Whilst there are specified limits as to the total amount of money that can be advanced and the amount of time an advance needs to be repaid there is discretion available to exceed any specified limits on the basis of hardship caused to the person and/or their immediate family (Russell & Bradford, 2022; Stephens, 2019; Work and Income, 2021, n.d.-a).

Food grant: part of the special needs grants (SNG) programme (Work and Income, n.d.-b). Unemployed and employed people, dependent upon their income and assets have potential eligibility if they have an immediate need to buy food and have no money to do so and would otherwise have to go to a food bank (Stephens, 2019). There are twenty-six-week limits as to the amount of food grant payable dependent upon the numbers of people in the person's immediate family (i.e., spouse/partner and dependent children), but these limits can be exceeded in exceptional circumstances (Russell & Bradford, 2022; Work and Income, n.d.-b).

Jobseeker support (JSS): a taxable weekly main welfare benefit payment paid to people who are not "in full-time (paid) employment, but be seeking it, available for it, willing to undertake it and have taken reasonable steps to find it" (Stephens, 2019, p. 184). Eligibility is subject to income and asset testing. There is also a residency requirement, the person must be at least 18 years old and if

the person is married, or in a relationship in the nature of marriage, the income of the partner

may exclude eligibility. There are obligations and sanctions linked to JSS (Russell & Bradford, 2022;

Stephens, 2019).

Sole parent support (SPS): a taxable weekly main welfare benefit paid to an unemployed sole

parent of at least one dependent child. Eligibility is subject to income and asset testing. There is a

residency requirement and obligations and sanctions apply (Russell & Bradford, 2022; Stephens,

2019).

Supported living payment (SLP): a taxable weekly main welfare benefit paid to people who have an

illness or disability that is expected to last at least two years which makes them "incapable of

regularly working at least 15 hours a week in open employment" (Stephens, 2019, p. 229). There is

a residency requirement. A spouse or partner's income may preclude eligibility. SLP is also paid to

people caring for another person who would otherwise need to be in residential care (Russell &

Bradford, 2022; Stephens, 2019).

Temporary additional support (TAS): "a last resort to alleviate the financial hardship of people

whose essential costs cannot be met from their chargeable income and other resources"

(Stephens, 2019, p. 319). TAS lasts for thirteen weeks and is paid weekly then if the person wants

to continue to receive TAS their situation is reviewed, and a further application is made. During

the thirteen-week period the person is expected to have taken reasonable steps to either increase

their income or reduce their costs. A set formula is used to calculate the amount paid (Stephens,

2019). High rental housing cost is a frequent reason for TAS eligibility (Russell & Bradford, 2022).

Unsupported child benefit (UCB): is "payable to the 'principal caregiver' of a child who is living

away from his/her natural parents, adoptive parents or step-parents because they are unable to

provide full support, care and control of the child" (Stephens, 2019, p. 39). The UCB is a weekly

payment and is not income or asset tested.

Community groups, government departments and agencies

Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP): a community group working towards a poverty-free Aotearoa New Zealand. Their activities include individual welfare benefit advocacy, advocacy training, media work and public campaigns (Baker & Davis, 2017).

District Health Board: "District health boards (DHBs) were responsible for providing or funding the provision of health services in their district" (Manatu Hauora, 2022). DHBs were replaced by an alternative health structure on 1 July 2022.

Kāinga Ora: the full name is Kāinga Ora Homes and Communities. This is a government agency functioning as a public or social housing landlord with 69,000 houses (Kāinga Ora Homes and Communities). Tenants pay an income-related rent that is usually 25% of their gross weekly income (Russell & Bradford, 2022).

Ministry of Social Development (MSD): a government department that describes its activities as providing "employment, income support and superannuation services, funding to community service providers, social policy and advice to government, student allowance and loans, social housing assistance" (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.-a, para. 1). Income support means welfare benefit payments arising from the Social Security Act 2018. Research participants refer to MSD, treating this as synonymous with Work and Income (W&I).

Social Work Registration Board (SWRB): a government agency with the statutory authority for the registration of professional social workers and the registration of tertiary social work education providers (Social Work Registration Board, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

Work and Income (W&I or WINZ): a part of the Ministry of Social Development. Its purposes are listed in this order, as helping "people get jobs", supporting "employers to find staff", and providing "income support to those in need through benefits for people unable to support

themselves" and "allowances for people on low-to-middle incomes" (Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government).

Oranga Tamariki (OT): a government Ministry focused on "supporting any child in New Zealand whose wellbeing is at significant risk of harm" (Oranga Tamariki, n.d., para. 2).

Māori words/terms

The following words from the Māori language are used by research participants.

Aotearoa "North Island – now used as the Māori name for New Zealand" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 9).

Iwi "extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race – often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor" (Moorfield, 2011, pp. 47-48).

Kuia "elderly woman, grandmother, female elder" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 86).

Mana "prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 94).

Pākehā "New Zealander of European descent" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 133).

Rangatira "chief, (male or female), chieftain, chieftainess, master, mistress, boss, supervisor, employer, landlord, owner, proprietor – qualities of a leader is a concern for the integrity and prosperity of the people, the land, the language and other cultural treasures (e.g., oratory and song, poetry), and an aggressive and sustained response to outside forces that may threaten these" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 168).

Tāngata "person, man, human being" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 191).

Whakamā "be ashamed, shy, bashful, embarrassed 3 *n* shame, embarrassment" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 247)

Whakamana " to give authority to, give effect to, give prestige to, confirm, enable, authorise, legitimise, empower" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 248).

Whānau "extended family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people – "in modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 257)

Whangai "to feed, nourish, bring up, foster, adopt, raise, nurture, rear [...] foster child, adopted child – this is a customary practice. Often a couple's first child was brought up by grandparents or adopted by one of the brothers or sisters of a parent" (Moorfield, 2011, p. 258)

Chapter 1 Introduction

Research question – How well does social work education prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better?

Braun and Clarke (2022) posit two differing approaches to literature reviews and by extension differing approaches to qualitative research. The first and traditional approach is to identify a gap in existing literature/knowledge possibly due to there being no research done regarding a specific topic. They suggest this "effectively reproduces a positivist-empiricist idea of research as truth-questing" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 120). With this approach the researcher fills a knowledge gap with a new truth. The second approach they refer to as the 'making an argument model' which "provides a rationale for your research question by situating, and contextualizing it within existing knowledge, theory, and/or context" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 120). They see this model as providing an opportunity to contribute to collective understanding.

This research arises from both the traditional approach and the making an argument model identified by Braun & Clarke. The literature review (below) confirms the existence of a gap in what has been written about social work education and practice. The research data from eight semi-structured interviews confirms the existence of this gap and goes further to suggest that social work education did not prepare the research participants well to work with people claiming welfare benefits. In identifying this gap my intention is not to lay claim to 'a new truth' but to begin a collective discussion that may lead to collective understanding and action(s). This is a genuine attempt to raise ethical and practical issues about social work's response to the needs of people who are experiencing poverty and need to claim welfare benefits.

1.1 Thesis structure

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research by providing a history of Aotearoa New Zealand's welfare benefit system and then considers the impacts of professionalisation and the creation of the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) upon social work. My positionality is also discussed as it provides further context for this research.

Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature. This begins by detailing the methods used to identify relevant literature and identifies a gap in the literature. The literature review moves on to address the difficulty of defining poverty. It then proceeds to identify definitions of neoliberalism and its impact on social work and welfare benefit reform. The prevalence of the need for welfare benefit payments is detailed before considering the implications of a social work focus on the welfare of children and the prevalence of poverty upon this area of social work practice. Different forms of advocacy are discussed before considering the difference othering or solidarity can make to the practice of advocacy. The literature review moves on to the complexity and unjust nature of Aotearoa New Zealand's current welfare benefit system and the need for welfare benefit advocacy.

Chapter 3 addresses the underlying epistemology of this research, links this to its methodology and on to the research methods.

Chapter 4 addresses the methods used beginning with the piloting of the semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B). It describes both the recruitment criteria and the recruitment process. It details demographic information pertaining to the recruited research participants before explaining the use of benefit advocacy scenarios which commence each semi-structured interview. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the reflexive thematic analysis method used.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of data arising from the participants' responses to welfare benefit advocacy scenarios. It also provides an analysis of themes developed using reflexive thematic analysis. Relevant literature is included to facilitate the analytic process.

Chapter 6 provides the conclusions of this research. It also identifies limitations and possibilities for future research.

1.2 Historical framing – the Aotearoa New Zealand welfare benefit system

The history of the Aotearoa New Zealand welfare benefit system is in almost all respects a history of, "processes and systems introduced from the middle of the 19th century, overwhelmingly reflecting settler, colonial and post-colonial perspectives" (O'Brien et al., 2010, p. 27). Mutu (2019) persuasively argues that the process of colonisation dispossessed Māori of 95% of their land and resources, ignored Māori sovereignty and rights to self-determination as guaranteed by two documents signed by rangatira; the 1835 He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni which can be literally translated as A Declaration of the Sovereignty of New Zealand and the 1840 Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi, "and left them in a state of poverty, deprivation and marginalisation while procuring considerable wealth, prosperity and privilege for British settlers" (Mutu, 2019, p. 3). The Waitangi Tribunal, a permanent commission of enquiry established in 1975 has heard Māori claims for equitable access to social security but the Tribunal's findings are not binding on the government (Mutu, 2019). The defining ideas of the welfare benefit system were monocultural and it remains monocultural (Stephens, 2019; Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019).

It is important to clarify the aspects of the welfare system that are and are not included in this history. Stephens (2019) asserts that the

> health system, child welfare and education all include within them systems of cash payments and other kinds of assistance that do not derive directly from social security legislation but could easily be said to comprise welfare assistance. (Stephens, 2019, p. 9)

This history will focus on matters pertaining to social security legislation and the welfare benefit payments deriving from that legislation.

A Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) was established by the New Zealand government in 2018 to conduct an extensive review of the welfare benefit system and recommend changes to that system. WEAG identified the wide-ranging intent of the New Zealand Social Security Act 2018, stating it is

> meant to provide a guarantee of financial and social support to ensure people have an adequate income and standard of living when needed […]. A wide cross section of New Zealanders face life shocks such as job loss, illness, disability or relationship breakdown which mean they need to receive government assistance to support themselves and their family. Other New Zealanders need support because their low wages mean they are unable to meet basic costs such as for housing, food, school and work. (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 5)

WEAG found that this intent was not being achieved and the welfare benefit system needed fundamental change. A significant impediment to achieving this intent is neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism, rather than being new, is "a return to classical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economic principles of non-interference by governments in the workings of a free market" (Harrington, 2005, p. 324). Intrinsic to neoliberalism is its accompanying ideology which will be detailed within the literature review below. Meritocracy was a key new idea arising from the late eighteenth century

American and French revolutions. It promoted an assumption that individuals through their own effort,

their own merit could get out of poverty. Therefore, those who remained in poverty did so out of a

personal choice or from a lack of personal merit, thereby justifying ideas of personal responsibility and

individual fault as an explanation for poverty. Meritocracy and individual fault were closely linked to an

earlier distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor which was fully developed by the end of

the seventeenth century (Stephens, 2019). In England, consistent with the above were Poor Laws,

including the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 (Stephens, 2019) which gave effect to the notions of

personal responsibility and individual fault and made poverty relief contingent upon work within a

workhouse. These workhouses were famously portrayed by social commentators of the time, the most

well-known being Charles Dickens, as being the cause of many social problems rather than a solution

(Stephens, 2019). Henriques (1968) observed

> It is difficult to examine the social history of the early nineteenth century without
>
> accepting the Marxist analysis for that particular period, which is, after all, the period in
>
> which Marx's ideas were formed. The New Poor Law, mitigated as it was by the goodwill
>
> of many individuals including devoted Guardians and Assistant Commissioners, was part
>
> of a body of class legislation based on selfishness and class interest. As such it tainted the
>
> good things (such as public infirmaries) which grew from it. (Henriques, 1968, pp. 370-
>
> 371)

Referring to Aotearoa New Zealand, Stephens (2019) identifies a common perception, dating back

to the eighteenth century, that people in poverty are personally responsible for their situation.

She maintains there is no basis in objective reality to justify this perception. Consistent with

Stephens, McClure (1998) has identified that initial Aotearoa New Zealand welfare benefit

legislation emphasised the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor where those

of questionable moral character were not eligible for support. The early immigrants arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand from the United Kingdom were determined to leave behind the workhouse institutions arising from the Poor Laws. Despite the desire to not replicate the worst excesses of the workhouses legislative attempts to address poverty were often punitive and placed responsibility for supporting pākehā experiencing poverty with their families and churches including the Destitute Persons Ordinance of 1846 (Stephens, 2019). A series of economic depressions from 1870 onwards showed that families and churches were not capable of supporting the increasing numbers of people experiencing poverty (O'Brien et al., 2010).

The Old Age Pensions Act 1898 provided a very modest assistance to people aged over 65 but there were several eligibility criteria including a 25-year residential requirement. This included an attempt to distinguish between deserving and undeserving applicants. The eligibility criteria also included an ambiguous "stipulation that the applicant be 'of good moral character' and for the five years preceding the claim had been 'leading a sober and reputable life'" (McClure, 1998, pp. 17-18). Māori collective land ownership was used to exclude them from eligibility (McClure, 1998; Stephens, 2019). Asian people were explicitly excluded (McClure, 1998; O'Brien et al., 2010). By the end of the nineteenth century Aotearoa New Zealand's welfare benefit system perpetuated moralistic judgments that adversely impacted upon people's eligibility for support. This welfare benefit system also perpetuated institutional racism preventing access to support for Māori and Asian people.

The first years of the twentieth century saw piecemeal extensions to Aotearoa New Zealand's welfare benefit system. Support for widows began in 1911, for returned servicemen in 1918, the blind in 1924 and a limited family assistance in 1926 (O'Brien et al., 2010). The economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s saw the introduction of a workfare regime where there would be 'no pay without work'. Features of this system were men living in work camps and

doing temporary jobs (O'Brien et al., 2010). Also, "The meagre pay and irregular days of relief work, and the purposeless nature of much of the work, humiliated large numbers of men" (McClure, 1998, p. 50). Connections between work and eligibility for welfare benefits is a feature of the current legislation and is a form of workfare. (Baker & Davis, 2017). The first Labour Party government was elected in 1935 and, in response to the hardship and poverty of the depression, passed the Social Security Act 1938 (Stephens, 2019). The Long Title of this act sets out its purpose.

> An Act to provide for the payment of superannuation benefit and other benefits designed to safeguard the people of New Zealand from disabilities arising from age, sickness, widowhood, orphanhood, unemployment or other exceptional circumstances. (O'Brien et al., 2010, p. 30)

The Act was motivated by the intention to establish a shared collective responsibility for the well-being of citizens and bring together under one act the numerous prior Acts providing for financial support including those mentioned above (O'Brien et al., 2010; Stephens, 2019). This shared collective responsibility amounted to a social contract between the government and citizens. On one hand the government would provide financial support to maintain a reasonable standard of living and other social services including health care and education along with protection of employment standards, and on the other hand citizens would actively participate in training or seek employment when appropriate to do so. "This social contract is now out of balance" (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 6)

The fundamentals of the welfare benefit system remained intact throughout the 1950s and 1960s as there was little attention paid to welfare benefit issues during this period (O'Brien et al., 2010). The exception to this was the beginning of what has become a plethora of supplementary assistance now including food grants, accommodation supplements and temporary additional

support. "All of these programmes, however, had their eventual genesis and evolution set in 1951 with the implementation of the supplementary assistance scheme" (Stephens, 2019). This has given rise to highly discretionary eligibility criteria within programmes and Ministerial Directives (Stephens, 2019; Work and Income, 2021, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

The National Party brought about the end of two decades of lack of attention on social security issues by promising in its 1969 election manifesto to "enquire into social security" (McClure, 1998, p. 162). The resultant 1972 Royal Commission of Inquiry into Social Security stated that need "relates to the adequacy of income to give a *reasonable* standard of living compared to that enjoyed by the rest of the community" (O'Brien et al., 2010, p. 31). The Royal Commission emphasised the word 'reasonable' and went on to identify belonging to, and participation in society as a fundamental approach to welfare (O'Brien et al., 2010; Stephens, 2019). This is consistent with the 'social contract' identified by the Welfare Expert Advisory Group.

The National party led government's 1991 benefit cuts were a significant departure from this 'social contract'. These cuts can be seen as a response to the economic reforms of the mid-1980s and the consequent rise in unemployment and the numbers of people receiving welfare benefit payments. "In 1981, the unemployed rate was only 3.9% but it reached a peak of 10.6% in 1991 and 1992, with 180,400 people unemployed in 1992" (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 34). Moving from a goal of social participation to, as the Minister argued, provision of

> sufficient assistance to maintain individuals and families in the daily essentials of food, clothing, power and housing at a decent level. Assistance will be closely targeted on genuine need and people will be expected to support themselves when they have the ability to do so. (O'Brien et al., 2010, p. 32)

Concurrent with benefit cuts was a public discourse where people receiving benefit payments were described as being dependent and the creation of a non-defined 'benefit dependency' social

problem. However, there was a clear implication that people were deliberately and unnecessarily receiving welfare benefit payments, in popular vernacular they were 'bludgers' (O'Brien et al., 2010). This is entirely consistent with the historic notions of individual fault discussed above.

The Social Security Act 2018 was a rewrite of the Social Security Act 1964 which was "a consolidation of the original Social Security Act 1938 and its subsequent amendments" (Stephens, 2019, p. 53). The 2018 Act shows an increasing importance on individual responsibility and where paid work is emphasised as the way to achieve self-sufficiency (Stephens, 2019). Here the neoliberal emphasis on the individual and negation of the collective is evident.

In 2019 the government appointed Welfare Expert Advisory Group presented a detailed analysis of the social welfare system. Its overall recommendation was to return to a 'social contract' model that went beyond a 'safety net' to the restoration of people's dignity enabling their meaningful participation with their families and communities, they refer to this as 'whakamana tāngata'.

> The essential principles of whakamana tāngata are to provide income support sufficient for an adequate standard of living, to provide employment support to help people find and retain good and appropriate work, and to treat people receiving this support with dignity and respect. In return, people receiving this support are expected to take up the opportunities to participate. We hope that agreement to these principles can be the basis for a lasting parliamentary commitment on social security that will take New Zealand into the future with pride. (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 2)

Summary

Aotearoa New Zealand's welfare benefit system originates from the United Kingdom's welfare benefit system which is based upon historical notions of a meritocracy and the existence of the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. There is a logical extension of these to,

what is now identified a key characteristic of neoliberalism, individual fault/responsibility. Neoliberalism will be further discussed within the literature review.

Colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand featured numerous breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi including ignoring Māori sovereignty, and their rights to collective self-determination, and loss of land resulting in Māori impoverishment and wealth accumulation for pākehā settlers. These settlers brought with them the fundamentals of the United Kingdom's monocultural welfare benefit system. Initial legislated welfare provision entrenched the deserving/undeserving poor distinction and denying welfare benefit entitlements to Māori based on their collective social structure and to Asian people. Thereby providing the basis for a punitive approach and beginning the welfare benefit system's history of institutional racism.

A social contract approach to welfare benefits began with the Social Security Act 1938 and continued through to the 1991 benefit cuts. These benefit cuts were linked to significant increases in the numbers of people receiving welfare benefits as a result of the 1980's neoliberal economic reforms. Contemporaneously there was a renewed portrayal of people receiving welfare benefits as 'bludgers', emphasising the alleged individual faults of these people. More recently the Social Security Act 2018 perpetuates the emphasis on individual's accepting their personal responsibility to get into paid work thereby denying structural causes of unemployment. The 2019 Welfare Expert Advisory Group has recommended a return to a social contract approach to welfare as an alternative to the current dysfunctional, complex and punitive welfare benefit system.

1.3 Social work education – professionalisation and the New Zealand Social Work Registration Board

To become a registered social worker requires a minimum of a bachelors' qualification that is recognised by the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) and registration with the SWRB (Careers NZ., 2021; SWRB, n.d.-c). The SWRB recognises qualifications provided by five

tertiary institutions in Auckland. These institutions are the Manukau Institute of Technology, Massey University, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, the University of Auckland, and Unitec New Zealand (SWRB, n.d.-b). It is useful to consider how and why the SWRB was established and the implications of this.

Eighty years ago, it was posited that there is "a fundamental relationship between social work as it is practiced and what social workers are taught" (Nash, 1998, p. 1). More recently social work education has been linked to both professionalisation and statutory regulation (Beddoe, 2018; Hunt, 2016; Hunt et al., 2019). The process of professionalisation within Aotearoa New Zealand social work has led to compulsory registration of practicing social workers. This compulsory registration is administered by the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB). The SWRB emphasises its role is to ensure public safety and enhance professionalism. Enforcing compulsory registration is integral to the SWRB's role (SWRB, n.d.-c). The SWRB also has regulatory powers over the content of social work education courses. Beddoe (2018) alludes to possible disputes between social work educators and the SWRB stating,

> To a large extent programmes have considerable autonomy in organising their curriculum but must satisfy the regulator (SWRB) that they will design teaching and learning that equips graduates to practice competently in Aotearoa New Zealand and that ensures that bicultural practice is a significant focus in qualifying courses. (Beddoe, 2018, pp. 309-310)

Issues arising from colonisation and Te Tiriti o Waitangi have been central to long-standing debates within social work. It has been argued that it is, "not possible to understand how social work education has been developed in Aotearoa New Zealand without first understanding that social work itself is part of a colonisation process" (Beddoe, 2018, p. 306). The negative effects on Māori of colonisation and breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including the prevalence of poverty, are well-documented (Durie, 1985; Mutu, 2019). Within social work there has been an explicit focus

on the promotion of Māori identity, bicultural practice, and the competence to work with Māori in ways that are culturally appropriate (Beddoe, 2018; SWRB, n.d.-a).

There is a less explicit focus on addressing the prevalence of poverty within Māori, for example, the SWRB ten core competence standards do not mention 'poverty' preferring to refer to "principles of human rights and social and economic justice", "mechanisms of oppression and discrimination" and "the need for social change to provide equity and fairness for all" (Social Work Registration Board, n.d.-a, para. 7-8). These generalised statements may assist the 'considerable autonomy' within social work education Beddoe (2018) refers to above.

Whilst social work educators have 'considerable autonomy' there is a debate regarding the limitations imposed by professionalisation upon the content of social work education and upon social work practice. Nash (1998) noted,

> There have been many struggles for power between the profession, the educators, employers and the state over these matters which are related to the purposes and consequent curricula required for social work education. Unless educators and employers share a similar view of social work, gaps may exist between employer expectations and the type of social worker to graduate. The contested nature of social work as either an agent of social control or liberation is another theme of significance. (Nash, 1998, p. 43)

In Aotearoa New Zealand social workers are employed by not-for-profit, Māori and iwi agencies, the education sector and in private practice. However, the state is the major employer of social workers with 23% of registered social workers employed by state-run health services and 22% employed by Oranga Tamariki the state agency responsible for child welfare (Careers NZ., 2021). This indicates the power and influence the state has over social work education both through the legislated establishment of the SWRB and as the employer of 45% of registered social workers.

Hunt et al. (2019) posited a need to respond to the risk of social work regulation lessening the social justice foundation of social work. This response should include a necessity for social workers and social work educators to maintain an understanding of the causes of injustice and to then act upon that understanding. Furthermore, there is an inherent contradiction between the need for governmental support for social work professionalisation through the enactment of legislation and social work's commitment to social action, social justice and equity. This commitment, if acted upon, will inevitably lead to situations where a government's policies and interests will be challenged (Hunt, 2016).

The influence of the state upon social work education and practice is further evidenced by the motivation for the establishment of the SWRB through the Social Worker Registration Act 2003. Hunt (2016) argues, "While the profession had been debating the pros and cons of registration for many decades, ultimately its inception over 2000-2003 represented a pragmatic political response to the pervasive critique of social work in preceding years" (p. 896). This 'pervasive critique' included "reviews investigating practice and institutional and structural racism (Hunt, 2016, p. 895).

Furthermore, there was a "state response to risk and a crisis of trust in social work following child deaths" (Hunt, 2016, p. 896). The parliamentary political desire to limit potentially damaging publicity regarding allegations that the social work profession was racist and/or not competent to ensure the safety of children provided the impetus to establish the SWRB. This motivation can be characterised as one of political risk minimisation. Furthering a social justice purpose was not a factor.

Careers NZ (2021) identifies that amongst a range of activities social workers do is to help people to access benefits. This can be seen as a reference to, at least in part, welfare benefit advocacy which is likely to involve challenging the government's current welfare policy and existing welfare

benefit provision. A government may not welcome such a challenge. How social work education addresses this social work activity is at the core of this research.

Summary

The culmination of professionalisation has been legislation creating the Social Work Registration Board, a compulsory registration of practicing social workers regime administered by the SWRB and accreditation of social work courses also administered by the SWRB. Whilst social work educators have a large amount of autonomy regarding course content the SWRB has the legislated capacity to determine what constitutes professional social work and the content of social work courses. The motivation behind this legislation was that of political risk minimisation rather than development of social work's capacity to further social justice.

The core competencies identified by the SWRB include, when working with Māori, the ability to practice in ways that are culturally appropriate. This is within the context of the centrality of biculturalism as social work's response to its perceived obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the negative effects of colonisation including the poverty disproportionately experienced by Māori. There is no corresponding clarity as to a competency to work with people experiencing poverty including Māori who disproportionately experience poverty.

1.4 My positionality as researcher

Positionality incorporates the values of the researcher and the position taken in respect of a research project and the social and political context of the research project (Holmes, 2020). Implicit in this statement is the need to consider researcher subjectivity as an unavoidable part of the research process. Rather than being problematic, researcher subjectivity should be seen as a resource (Braun & Clarke, 2019). There is a large amount of literature that asserts that objectivity is not possible within the research process (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2019;

Corbin D. S. & Buckle, 2018; Custodio & Gathuo, 2020; Hense, 2016; Holmes, 2020; Torres, 2018).

It is therefore important to explicitly state one's positionality so that any claims of bias and lack of

credibility or rigor can be addressed. In this instance my positionality as the researcher has

undeniably motivated my choice of research project.

I have previously set out my positionality regarding crucial aspects of this research project (Russell,

2015, 2017). Firstly, considering my allegiance to those experiencing poverty,

> I firmly believe that it is not possible to witness the human costs of unemployment, low
>
> wages and poverty on one hand and the wealth and privilege on the other, without
>
> becoming clear that there is a need to collectively work in solidarity with others who share
>
> a common goal of a better future. (Russell, 2015, p. 59)

Secondly, whilst working for Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP), I have previously espoused a

'competent solidarity' in preference to a professional/client dichotomy,

> The 'professional' and the 'client' are clearly different, and a clear imbalance of power
>
> exists. There is no sharing of a common interest […] Within this model, it is perfectly
>
> acceptable to stay silent and spectate while a bureaucratic system spits people out into
>
> untenable situations. AAAP rejects the notion of the professional or expert doing things to
>
> compliant clients. We have personal experience of unemployment; we know we are no
>
> different from the people who come to us needing support to access their rights. We do
>
> not use the term 'client'. We work with people. Their oppression is our oppression, their
>
> experiences are our experiences, their interests are our interests. (Russell, 2015, p. 61)

I further clarified my position regarding professional social work in 2017 writing,

> My thinking around competent solidarity began with a rejection of professional social
>
> work. Professional social work is taught as if it exists within a political vacuum, largely
>
> devoid of class analysis and is incapable of addressing issues of poverty and oppression. If

social workers live in a world of 'consensus', then there is no need to choose a side

because, in the world of consensus, the interests of the rich and the poor, the coloniser

and the colonised are the same. In this world, the distinction between the 'professional

social worker' and their 'client' makes perfect sense". (Russell, 2017, p. 137)

I observed that,

The professional social worker is likely to be unwilling to explicitly stand alongside

someone who is differentiated from them by being their client. To become a professional

social worker there is no prerequisite need to have any clarity of political purpose.

(Russell, 2017, p. 137)

I then posited that,

The term client is a clear announcement there is a distinction between that person and

the professional. The professional is the expert, and the client is the recipient of that

expertise. Within this relationship there is no shared interest, and a consequent

unwillingness by the professional to take any form of risk. (Russell, 2017, p. 138)

And,

Being able to address the most immediate financial needs of the people they are working

with is a fundamental issue of credibility but this topic is neglected within social work

education and consequently, social work practice. Many people come to AAAP because

their social worker has not been able to support their right and need to access social

welfare payments. In 2016, over 300 people attended benefit advocacy training run by

AAAP; approximately half of these people were social workers. This should be mandatory.

(Russell, 2017, p. 142)

Thirdly, I have previously posited within W&I "there is a toxic culture of harassment, intimidation

and punishment" (Russell, 2017, p. 138) that is consistent with neoliberal welfare reform.

The above clearly sets out my positionality regarding working in solidarity with people in poverty, my views of the social work response to poverty and more specifically social work's lack of response to welfare benefit advocacy, and the existence of a toxic culture within W&I. I am motivated to do research to ascertain if my opinions will be borne out through a process of qualitative research where I "embrace a political positioning instead of performing the pretence of neutrality" (Custodio & Gathuo, 2020, p. 144). This explicit rejection of neutrality raises the issue of bias. "To achieve a pure objectivism is a naïve quest and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity. We can strive to remain objective but must be ever mindful of our subjectivities". (Bourke, 2014, p. 3). Bourke is acknowledging the impossibility of removing subjectivity from the research process whilst, at least, suggesting that objectivity is preferred. Braun & Clarke (2022) in their observations of a traditional scientific method link subjectivity to allegations of bias. They reject this negative association between subjectivity and bias, viewing subjectivity as an essential asset to qualitative research. My explicit positionality sets out my 'bias' and provides the motivation for undertaking this research as well as providing a knowledge base from which meaningful analysis of the research data can occur. Another issue related to my positionality is my status as an insider/outsider.

Whilst rejecting the professional/client dichotomy I continued to practice as an activist employed by Mangere East Family Services as their social work practice leader. I incorporated the competent solidarity model developed whilst working at Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP). In this work there were numerous positions held simultaneously and this is analogous to the numerous positions held during a research project. These different positions can be understood using a distinction between the researcher as insider or outsider. The researcher as insider has a high degree of familiarity with the community from which the research participants come from, or the researcher is a member of that community and conversely an outsider does not have that familiarity or community membership (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Hill & Dao, 2020). It is possible to

occupy the space between the insider and outsider where it is possible to simultaneously be both

insider and outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). It is also possible to see the distinction between

insider and outsider as being on a continuum where it is again possible to be simultaneously

insider and outsider (Holmes, 2020). My insider status arises from numerous factors including,

registration with the New Zealand Social Work Registration Board, employment as a social work

practice leader, and having qualified as a social worker in 1986. My personal experience and

opinions, as described above, of professional social work draw me towards being an outsider, as

does my activist work with AAAP and prior to that my involvement in the unemployed workers'

rights movement. The perceptions of the research participants are significant (Bourke, 2014) and

they may perceive me as either an insider or outsider dependent upon their own political and

world views. Furthermore, simply by being the researcher I am outside of the participants'

experience of the research process. Being simultaneously both insider and outsider or

alternatively holding positions on an insider/outsider continuum further assists in the research

process where analysis is facilitated by these diverse perspectives.

Chapter 2 Literature review

Introduction

The literature in this review has been found in four ways. Firstly, I have searched for literature directly relevant to the research question. Secondly, using my experience as a social worker and welfare benefit advocate, I sought literature broadly relevant to the research question and evaluated the relevance of the literature found. I found references pertaining to poverty, neoliberalism, welfare benefit reform, prevalence of need for welfare benefit payments, child welfare, advocacy, social work, and social work education. I had a particular focus on identifying social work academic research regarding the above. This particular focus is consistent with the research question which looks at how social work education prepares social workers to work with people needing to claim welfare benefit payments it is therefore reasonable to look for relevant social work academic literature. Thirdly, I found further literature from the references listed in the literature. Fourthly, I consulted experts in social work and advocacy to identify further relevant literature.

2.1 The gap in the literature

Research conducted under the auspices of Ako Aotearoa – The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence used an online survey of newly qualified social workers and their managers/professional supervisors as part of research into the question: "How well-prepared are Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) (social workers in their first two years of practice) to enter professional social work, and how is their learning being supported and enhanced in the workplace?" (Ballantyne et al., 2019, p.4).

The online survey inquired "into the types of specialist knowledge respondents considered to be relevant to their present job" (Ballantyne et al., 2019, p. 38). Respondents were given a list of

sixteen types of specialist knowledge. None of these types of knowledge referred to either poverty or advocacy. This is consistent with this literature review where there is literature pertaining to issues relevant to the research question. These issues are defining poverty, neoliberalism and its impact upon the welfare benefit system, social work and social work education, the prevalence of need for welfare benefit payments, a social work focus on the welfare of children, advocacy, and a complex and unjust welfare system and the need for welfare benefit advocacy. However there remains a significant gap pertaining to the role of social work education in preparing social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits. This directly relates to the research question.

I searched Google Scholar, Scopus, and the Australia New Zealand Reference Centre using 'welfare benefit*' OR 'social security' AND 'advocacy'. A second search added AND 'social work'. I obtained over 300 search results the significant majority were not relevant to the research question. For example, from the Australia New Zealand Reference Centre database there were newspaper articles of which only two had some relevance (Cardy, 1997; Norgate, 1997). Significantly, both articles were published in 1997. Furthermore, with the exception of an unpublished welfare advocacy handbook co-authored by Dr Sue Bradford and myself (Russell & Bradford, 2022), there was no social work academic literature regarding a specific need for welfare benefit advocacy skills. Also, no literature regarding welfare benefit advocacy social work education course content was found. It has been suggested that "social workers do not consider the supplying of material assistance to be 'real' or 'professional' social work" (Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009, p. 237). This suggestion supports the relevance of the research question; how well does social work education prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better?

2.2 Defining poverty

There is extensive literature regarding definitions of poverty (Gweshengwe et al., 2020; Johnson,

2020). Poverty has a variety of socially constructed meanings dependent upon differing political

belief. These political beliefs emphasise either the presence of individual fault or the need for

government intervention and support (Stephens, 2019). Consequently there is no agreed upon

definition of poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand (Haigh, 2018; Johnson, 2020; Stephens, 2019) and

no internationally agreed upon definition (Johnson, 2020). However, there are two common types

of poverty definition, these are absolute and relative poverty (Gweshengwe et al., 2020; Johnson,

2020). Absolute poverty can be defined as "a condition of acute deprivation in the form of severe

food insecurity, premature death, ill-health, illiteracy, homelessness, lack of clothing, etc."

(Gweshengwe et al., 2020, p. 7). Relative poverty is defined by comparison of people in the

context of their society (Gweshengwe et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020). In Aotearoa New Zealand a

poverty-line threshold of either 50 or 60 percent of median household income is used (Haigh,

2018; Stephens, 2019). This effectively compares people who are either above or below the

threshold.

In 2012 the New Zealand Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group saw poverty as

involving,

> material deprivation and hardship. It means, for instance, a much higher chance of having
>
> insufficient nutritious food, going to school hungry, wearing worn-out shoes or going
>
> barefoot, having inadequate clothing, living in a cold, damp house and sleeping in a shared
>
> bed. It often means missing out on activities that most New Zealanders take for granted,
>
> like playing sport and having a birthday party. It can also mean much narrower horizons –
>
> such as rarely travelling far from home. For instance, many children in low-income families

in the Hutt Valley and in Porirua have never been the short distance to Wellington city.

(Haigh, 2018, p. 104)

Whilst detailing some specific features of poverty like living in cold and damp housing the above description implicitly compares children living in poverty to those who do not, reinforcing the relative poverty approach within Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.3 Neoliberalism

In 1970 Milton Friedman set out a doctrine that stated to the exclusion of all other considerations, the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits. The social consequences of the maximisation of profit were not relevant. (Friedman, 1970, September 13). This initial doctrine influenced many of the characteristics of what became known as neoliberalism. This is seen as a political and economic framework of strong individual property rights, free markets and free trade intended to promote the accumulation of private wealth. This is in conjunction with attacks on the capitalist welfare state and its social services (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Garrett, 2018; Harvey, 2005; Hyslop, 2016a).

Literature also emphasises the significance of individual responsibility as being a key feature of neoliberalism which allows for a denial of the existence of social or structural causes of poverty (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Delanty, 2005; Morley et al., 2017; Sakellariou & Rotarou, 2017; Schrecker, 2016). The notion of individual responsibility is inherently linked to the notion of individual fault. If you are responsible for your socioeconomic situation, for example living in poverty, the neoliberal argument is that this is because of your personal failings. Correspondingly, if you are wealthy, that is an indication of your personal merit. Furthermore, paid work is explicitly linked to self-worth and individual responsibility replaces social citizenship (Hyslop, 2016a).

Fenton adds to a definition of neoliberalism stating it is "the privileging and deregulation of markets and corporations, and the attendant shrinking of the public spheres including cuts to public services and welfare (austerity)" (Fenton, 2021, p. 2). She goes on to emphasise neoliberalism's negative impacts upon the protection of workers' wages and conditions arguing that deregulation of industry inevitably leads to minimal protection for workers including no guaranteed working hours and to an increasing number of working poor.

Friedman's 1970 doctrine of social responsibility being the maximisation of profit is reflected in more recent definitions of neoliberalism that refer to free or unfettered markets allowing for individual accumulation of capital or wealth. It is further reflected in the imposition of capitalist market/business measures upon social services with an implicit link to these measures being socially responsible – this is the result of the purposeful attacks on welfare capitalism referred to above. Furthermore, Friedman's reference to social responsibility is, at least, an implicit reference to an ideological position that is expanded upon in these definitions of neoliberalism where not being in paid work adversely affects self-esteem and individual interest replaces common interest, and where individual responsibility translates to notions of individual fault. Neoliberalism is a form of capitalism prioritising state deregulation (Fenton, 2021) whose sole purpose is the maximisation of profit without regard to social consequences (Friedman, 1970, September 13; Garrett, 2018) and wherever neoliberal policies have been implemented they "have increased economic inequality and insecurity, often accompanied by increases in poverty (however measured)" (Schrecker, 2016, p. 956). It has been posited that "neoliberalism, originally an economic theory, has evolved into a socio-political ideology and extended its hegemonic influence to all areas of life" (Bettache & Chiu, 2019, p. 8).

2.3.1 Neoliberalism's impact on social work

There have historically been two conflicting views as to the focus of social work. The first has been informed by moralistic views of individual fault within people experiencing poverty. The second has been informed by critical views of structural causes of poverty (Chambon, 2013; Darroch, 2017). Neoliberalism has reinforced the former view and dismissed the latter. Morley et al. (2017) contend neoliberalism has colonised social work education and its orthodoxy promotes individual responsibility and denies the existence of structural causes of social issues. Consistent with individualisation, social work methods and techniques prioritise psychotherapy and other individually focused interventions in preference to addressing structural causes of poverty (Chereni, 2016).

Fenton (2021), making use of Nancy Fraser's analysis of 'progressive neoliberalism', provides some interesting and relevant insights. She notes,

> The fact that 1% of people own wealth equivalent to the other 99% is an acceptable consequence of "progressive neoliberalism" as long as within that 1% half are women, and minority ethnic people, disabled people, and LGBTQ+ people are represented in their population ratios. The real injustice, that is the fact that 1% own wealth equivalent to that of the other 99% goes unchallenged. (Fenton, 2021, p. 3)

This proportional representation of people who are not heterosexual white males in the 1% fits into notions of individual responsibility/fault, and individual merit because 'progressive neoliberalism' does not impede, but rather, it encourages this proportional representation on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation. It can be argued that the 1% is potentially open to anyone possessing the meritorious qualities needed and who are thus deserving of their position within the 1%. The corollary of this is that those comprising the 99% are

excluded because of their faults; they are undeserving of being part of the 1%. 'Progressive neoliberalism' further removes injustice from a socio-economic context.

Fenton (2021), also, usefully points to three studies of British attitudes to welfare benefit payments and the unemployed. The first study found that people born during the Margaret Thatcher led Conservative government, from 1969 to 1984, were most likely to believe social problems were caused by the behaviour of individuals. The second study occurred ten years after the first and analysed data from the British Attitudes Survey from 1985 to 2012. It found that the millennial generation born between 1977 and 1990 "were more likely to believe that benefits made people lazy, that unemployed people could easily get a job if they wanted and that distribution via progressive taxation was not desirable" (Fenton, 2021, pp. 5-6). The third, is an attitudinal study of students enrolled in social work, education and community education in the United Kingdom conducted by Fenton. These students were born after 1994. She found these students, along with younger and more experienced practicing social workers, had significantly internalised neoliberal hegemonic ideology expressing punitive and authoritarian attitudes towards unemployed people and those experiencing poverty and that this is consistent with the above two studies. Furthermore, Fenton asserts we should be "aware that group-based oppression is the pre-occupation of the media and of many institutions and universities. It has become the default way to think about social justice and comprises the 'progressive' aspect of Fraser's 'progressive neoliberalism'"(Fenton, 2021, p. 5).

This culminates in social work practice that predominantly ignores poverty as an issue preferring to focus on individual fault or oppression arising from issues of identity. For over fifty years neoliberalism has developed and exercised a hegemonic dominance it is therefore somewhat unsurprising that neoliberal ideology, particularly in its progressive form has influenced the practice of social work.

Regarding social work education, Fenton asserts it "must face head-on the very significant challenge of helping students who may well have internalised the current socio-political hegemony of 'progressive neoliberalism' to understand how neoliberalism working as intended, creates poverty, inequality, and hardship" (Fenton, 2021, p. 11).

Fenton does not offer any specific proposal for content within social work education to achieve the goal she has identified nor how to link this macro-analysis to practical skills. So, assuming social work education in the UK can enable students to achieve an understanding of the links between neoliberalism and poverty; how do those students link this understanding to skills to practically support people in poverty? This is relevant to very similar issues in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Darroch (2017) in a qualitative study for his master's in social work qualification, involving an extensive literature review and semi-structured interviews of ten practicing social workers, described neoliberalism's major negative impact on social workers' capacity and willingness to engage in social justice activity, including advocacy. He describes social work managers aligned to neoliberal ideology that is hostile to this activity and who promote a punitive approach to social work practice. He suggests that social workers are ill-equipped to function in this neoliberal environment in ways that are consistent with espoused social work ethics. He expresses a concern that, "Social work education may also be failing social workers. Social work courses often focus on individual practice skills rather than teaching how to practice to resist in challenging environments" (Darroch, 2017, p. 38). There is further literature from Aotearoa New Zealand social work academics emphasising a need to resist the influence of neoliberal ideology, particularly individual fault, upon social work practice and education (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Hyslop, 2016a, 2016b; Keddell, 2017). However, this need for resistance does not extend to discussion about the viability of welfare benefit advocacy as an area of social work

practice or topic within social work education. However, having completed qualitative research using semi-structured interviews with practicing social workers, Hyslop (2016a) concludes that the social work practice of the research participants resists individual fault but the ongoing pressure to adopt models of practice favoured by employers remains.

Within this environment there is an identified need for a social work education response in Aotearoa New Zealand to neoliberalism. Consistent with Fenton's analysis above "Many social work students were raised in the neo-liberal era where the post-war consensus on welfare had diminished and thus may be blind to the assumptions embedded in current discourse about people in poverty" (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016, p. 149).

Beddoe & Keddell describe the development of social work course content to foster an 'informed outrage' in their students. This involves forms of deliberate resistance by equipping students with a critical framework developing the capacity to analyse social policy and the psychosocial consequences of negative stereotyping and the implications for practice. Through an 'informed outrage' they argue students can be prepared for the realities of practice. (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016). This 'informed outrage' approach does not include advocacy skills in general or specific welfare benefit advocacy skills, thereby leaving the question of how does the 'informed outrage' become identifiable acts of social work practice?

2.3.2 Neoliberal welfare benefit reform

To examine the current impacts of neoliberal welfare benefit reform in Aotearoa New Zealand it is useful to consider the focus on work as recommended by the National Party-led government's 2010 Welfare Working Group (WWG) (Rebstock et al., 2011). The WWG was asked to recommend changes to reduce 'long-term welfare benefit dependency'. The WWG asserted there were few incentives and a lack of support for welfare dependent people to move into paid work and claimed "Enabling people to move into paid work reduces the risk of poverty, improves outcomes for

children and supports social and economic well-being" (Rebstock et al., 2011, p. 1). The WWG

recommended that unemployed people should receive clear and strong signals about their need

to prioritise work. These 'strong signals' would include sanctions where benefit payments could be

reduced by 50% or 100% if people did not comply with W&I expectations. They would also include

"Addressing unintended consequences from incentives for parents to have additional children"

(Rebstock et al., 2011, p. 15). This is an example of the WWG's belief that people were ripping-off

the system and they allege the existence of parents who were deliberately having additional

children for the purpose of remaining on a welfare benefit. So, to address this the WWG

recommended that work-testing of parents should begin when their youngest child was fourteen

weeks old (Rebstock et al., 2011). Subsequent to receiving the WWG report the then Minister of

Social Development, Paula Bennett announced a welfare reform programme emphasising a focus

on work, stating "we have greater aspirations for New Zealanders and their children, achieved

through work, not welfare" (Bennett, 2012, para. 9). At the core of these reforms were notions of

individual responsibility for being unemployed and that individuals exploited the system. The

proposed solution was to properly incentivise individuals who would then be able to find work.

This work-focused welfare reform is known as workfare and is clearly linked to neoliberalism

(Baker & Davis, 2017; Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021; Whitworth, 2021). A community-based

Alternative Welfare Working Group highlighted another key feature of neoliberal welfare reform,

the "strengthening ideology of individual responsibility" (O'Brien et al., 2010, p. 19). A focus on

work and notions of individual responsibility are fundamental tenets of neoliberalism. These are

questionable.

In contrast to the notions of individual responsibility, there are other stories than those told from

a neoliberal perspective. A recent research partnership between Auckland City Mission and the

University of Auckland Faculty of Education and Social Work conducted a qualitative survey study

engaging with over six hundred people regarding their experiences of food insecurity. The

research participants had frequent contact with W&I. Their reality and aspirations for themselves

and their children tell a very different story from that of neoliberal discourse. They

> aspire to meaningfully participate in society, contradicting neoliberal framings of the poor
>
> as being wilfully disengaged from society out of laziness, financial irresponsibility, or an
>
> inability to make good decisions for their whānau (Garthwaite, 2016; Graham et al., 2018;
>
> Swales et al., 2020). Many of our participants face living costs that far exceed their
>
> incomes, are encouraged into paid work that is neither appropriate nor well-paid, and/or
>
> must engage with a welfare system that does not trust them to make good decisions.
>
> These stigmatising narratives of the 'undeserving' poor are both implicit and manifest in
>
> current welfare settings, despite the disjuncture with lived experience of those on the
>
> margins. (Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021, p. 149)

This eloquently details the flawed neoliberal assumptions of individual responsibility/individual

fault and that any form of work is preferable to on-going receipt of benefit payments. Also, there

is no proof that reduced unemployment rates are linked to reduction in poverty rates (Smith,

2018). This seriously calls into question the validity of claims made by the proponents of neoliberal

welfare reform.

2.4 Prevalence of need for welfare benefit payments

In 2018 the Labour-led government established the Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG).

WEAG conducted a comprehensive review of the New Zealand welfare system and were provided

by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) with an array of statistics, including that "Each year

over 630,000 people receive payments from the welfare system" (Welfare Expert Advisory Group,

2019, p. 5). The table below provides further statistics regarding the number of people annually

receiving five different benefit payments as of December 2018 (Welfare Expert Advisory Group,

2019). This is far from an exhaustive list of all benefit payments but does further indicate the need

for welfare benefit payments. People receiving one of the three Main benefits listed (Jobseeker

support, sole parent support and supported living payment) are highly likely to receive or have

eligibility for one or more of the other three benefit payments listed (Stephens, 2019). In

reference to the amount of money people receive from welfare benefit payments WEAG found

that the "level of financial support is now so low that too many New Zealanders are living in

desperate situations" (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 6).

Table 1

Number of people receiving particular welfare benefit payments as of December 2018

Benefit payment	Number of people receiving this payment
Jobseeker support	134,557
Sole parent support	59,877
Supported living payment	95,317
Accommodation supplement	302,840
Disability Allowance	233,570
Unsupported child benefit/Orphan's benefit	11,547

It is also useful to emphasise that these statistics show that there were 59,877 Sole Parent Support

Main Benefits being paid and a further 11,547 Unsupported Child Benefit or Orphan's Benefit

payments being made to carers of children whose parents were either unable to care for them or

had passed away (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019). It is not clear how many children were

living with parents in receipt of other benefit payments. Further literature will show the emphasis

social work puts on the welfare of children.

2.5 Social work focus on the welfare of children

There is a clear link between neoliberal child protection and welfare reforms that occurred

between 2011 and 2013. Both sets of reforms were justified by pointing to the individual fault of

parents and people receiving welfare payments (Beddoe, 2013; Keddell, 2017).

Child protection has become central to the identity of the social work profession (Hyslop &

Keddell, 2018). It is therefore relevant to the research question to identify connections to this

field of social work practice and welfare benefit advocacy. An observational study of what social

workers do when visiting families to assess the possible risks that children face noted,

> In many cases, especially those involving suspected neglect kitchens, cupboards, and
>
> fridges were also inspected to check for standards of cleanliness and food provision – or to
>
> ensure that drugs or alcohol were not being purchased rather than milk and food for the
>
> children. (Ferguson, 2016, p. 285)

 Neglect has become a significant focus of child protection social work services (Gupta, 2017) and

this is an example of risk focused practice that localises fault within individual parents and is

consistent with the neoliberal paradigm (Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020). There is a vast amount of

literature on child protection social work that rejects neoliberal individual fault and looks towards

links between poverty and child protection social work interventions (Bywaters et al., 2018;

Featherstone et al., 2018; Hyslop, 2016b; Hyslop & Keddell, 2018; Keddell, 2017; Morris et al.,

2018; Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020). In England there are links between income inequality and high

rates of child protection social work contact with families (Bywaters et al., 2018). Also in England,

there is a questioning of biomedical models whilst proposing a social model that incorporates

economic, environmental, and cultural barriers to ensuring children are safe and cared for

(Featherstone et al., 2018).

The Child Welfare Inequalities Project (CWIP) used mixed research methods including a

quantitative study of data about more than 35,000 children who were subject to child protect

interventions throughout the United Kingdom on a specific day in 2015 along with child protection

social work practice case studies from England, Scotland and Wales. The purpose of the research

was to establish child welfare inequalities as being central to policy making, practice and research

both in the UK and internationally. This project began in 2014 and ended in 2019. It involved

research staff from ten universities across the UK. They found that social work professionals'

practice frequently did not include consideration of families' material circumstances in their

assessment, planning, and intervention.

> Income, debt, food, heating and clothing, employment and housing conditions were rarely
>
> considered risk factors in children's lives. Poverty has been the 'wallpaper of practice',
>
> widely assumed to be ever-present but rarely the focus of action by national or local
>
> policy makers or senior leaders and managers. It was not easy for social workers to obtain
>
> material help for families, to secure advice about debt or income maximisation or to
>
> challenge benefits, awards or sanctions. (Bywaters, 2020, p. 5)

Unsurprisingly, the social workers' difficulty in addressing the material issues faced by families has

a negative impact upon the relationship between social worker and family (Bywaters, 2020).

In Aotearoa New Zealand,

> Most of the client families served by statutory child protection are drawn from the brown
>
> proletariat. High risk circumstances – which must be effectively, compassionately, and
>
> safely responded to – are generated in situations of poverty which are not the results of
>
> individuals being work shy and benefit dependent. They are the direct result of
>
> inadequate income, overcrowded and substandard housing, inadequate education, poor
>
> health, and deprived neighbourhoods. This cumulative and cyclic disadvantage is an
>
> outcome of economic policy which promotes gratuitous consumption and lionises the
>
> accumulation of obscene levels of private wealth. (Hyslop, 2016b, p. 11)

Hyslop is alluding to the disproportionate prevalence of poverty within Māori and Pasifika

communities, and a rejection of neoliberalism and its individual fault explanations for the

existence of poverty.

A Poverty Aware Paradigm (PAP) (Krumer-Nevo, 2016) and an adapted Poverty Aware Paradigm for Child Protection (PAPCP) (Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020) has been proposed as an alternative to the current dominant neoliberal aligned risk-focused model. Based on their literature review, Saar-Heiman & Gupta (2020) identified the emergence of two main claims:

> first, that the current neoliberal era has created a punitive, individualised, and pathologising child protection system that obscures poverty and social context. Second, that an alternative poverty-aware and social justice-based approach to child protection social work is needed. (p. 1168)

A key element of both PAP and PAPCP is solidarity including active advocacy in addressing people's experiences of poverty and consequent needs for support (Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020). In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand this solidarity can extend to welfare benefit advocacy. The concept of solidarity will be further discussed below within this literature review.

2.6 Advocacy

Advocacy is integral to social work responses to the needs of people claiming welfare benefit entitlements (Baker & Davis, 2017; Russell, 2015, 2017). Advocacy broadly has two differing meanings (Baker & Davis, 2017; Chereni, 2016; Lombard & Viviers, 2020; Russell & Bradford, 2022). Within social work there is a distinction made between micro and macro advocacy (Bliss & Ginn, 2019). This distinction is reflected in reference to either case or cause advocacy. Case advocacy can be defined as "Speaking in or on behalf of an individual client in order to ensure his or her access to prescribed services and benefits" (Chereni, 2016, p. 511). Cause advocacy can be defined as "Speaking in or on behalf of a group or community to extend social, economic and civic rights to them and to effect reforms in norms of administration, legislation and policies" (Chereni, 2016, p. 511). These definitions do not refer to the interests of the social worker in the process of doing advocacy, they are consistent with a relationship between an active professional social work

expert and a passive client. Chereni (2016) sees advocacy as not being based on conflict with the status quo but rather relying upon collaboration and persuasion.

Another definition of advocacy is "actions undertaken by an advocate that seek social change to achieve social justice. Advocacy can occur at the individual, group, and/or community level" (Renau, 2021, p. 7). This definition, from Renau's recently completed Master's thesis from Palmerton North's Massey University campus, portrays advocacy as being done by an individual advocate and infers that others are not actively part of an advocacy process. Adding to Renau's definition, participants in his research identified an individual/social advocacy divide which is more consistent with the distinction between case and cause advocacy.

In contrast to case and cause advocacy there are other meanings which are based upon the existence of conflict and collective participation. Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP) is a non-profit community group undertaking anti-poverty activism including individual welfare benefit advocacy with an explicit purpose to challenge and resist neoliberal welfare reform (Baker & Davis, 2017). AAAP's anti-poverty activism included welfare benefit advocacy training, media work, public speaking, research and placements for social work students. Baker & Davis undertook a case study of AAAP. During this case study Davis was a volunteer advocate with AAAP. They posit another contrary form of advocacy to that of Chereni. They see advocacy as being a process of active conflict, in this instance, with the current welfare benefit system. Baker & Davis define class advocacy as interventions to "change a policy or practice on behalf of a group of clients who share the same problem or status" (Baker & Davis, 2017, p. 539). In contrast to the cause advocacy defined above using 'class' to describe a type of advocacy implicitly acknowledges the presence of a common interest based on shared economic experiences and interests (Crotty, 1998; Marx & Engels, 2010). They describe case advocacy as being incorporated into the pursuit of class advocacy by AAAP where case advocacy is one of a number of strategies that also include

lobbying, research, media commentary, developing coalitions, campaigning, and protest actions. To illustrate the connections between case and class advocacy Baker & Davis use the following example,

> On the 2nd of November 2016, the central Auckland office of labour hire and recruitment
> company Manpower Services became an unauthorised site of protest […] A small group of
> people affiliated with Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP), a non-profit organisation
> specialising in poverty activism and services for welfare beneficiaries, occupied the office
> and refused to leave. Others picketed at the street-entrance with a banner that read 'stop
> profiting from poverty'. The protest was catalysed by reports that Work and Income – the
> government agency responsible for administering social security benefit payments – had
> asked beneficiaries to sign exploitative employment agreements with Manpower Services
> that allegedly did not specify pay rates, work hours, or work locations, and allowed the
> company to collect information about a person's race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs,
> and political views. (Baker & Davis, 2017, p. 535)

The 'reports' which initiated this protest came from information provided by people seeking individual welfare benefit advocacy support from AAAP. The wider issues arising from this led to further research, media work, and the protest. This in turn led to more people seeking AAAP case advocacy support arising from the consequences of their experiences of the interface between Work and Income and employment recruitment companies. Case and class advocacy are intrinsically linked. Class advocacy expands upon cause advocacy by including a shared political interest between advocates and the people they are working with.

Two interlinked forms of advocacy are posited by Russell & Bradford (2022) that are consistent with the links between case and class advocacy. These are: "Collective advocacy: people work together to advocate for systemic change to law and policy, and to reform the ways laws and

policy are put into practice. And "Individual advocacy: advocates work with individuals and families to support them in accessing the resources and other assistance they need at the interface with government agencies and other service providers (p. 12).

Inherent in this definition of collective advocacy is the connectedness between 'an advocate' and others involved in a systemic change process. This is consistent with solidarity. Individual advocacy consciously avoids the use of the word 'case'. It is common for social workers to refer to people as 'clients' or 'cases'. This increases the likelihood of establishing a distance between the advocate/social worker and the people they are supporting (Russell & Bradford, 2022). This is consistent with othering.

2.6.1 Othering or solidarity

Professional distancing and the parallel concept of models of practice reliant on professional objectivity have been major platforms in professional education. In social work these ideas are often seen as contentious, unreasonable and, in some cases, unrealistic (Green et al., 2007, p. 449). Green et al. are describing an othering within the practice of professional social work and a corresponding debate about the appropriateness of this. Furthermore, these questions are worthy of consideration, Do we learn, develop, and use social work as a way of bringing people together to create stronger collectives? Or is the discipline used as a way of identifying vulnerable groups as problem populations? And has our knowledge the effect of distancing ourselves from 'them'? (Chambon, 2013, p. 123)

Chambon (2013) asserts a distinction between Self and Other has been part of social work from its beginning. She describes the rapid urbanisation of the nineteenth century in England, the USA, Canada, Germany, and France bringing the middle and upper class into uncomfortable close proximity to an urban poor who were living in slums. Whilst there was some who emphasised a

need for community solidarity, others within the middle and upper classes, whilst acknowledging that social conditions should be changed, wanted to attempt moral reform of the poor and, at least, remove children from their supposedly idle (lazy), drunken parents. In this context, Chambon posits the Self was the morally upright middle and upper class and the Other was the morally deficient slum-dwellers, and that this moral impulse remains a feature of current social work.

In addition to socio-economic differentiation, othering has been fostered by the development of social work as a profession with the professional social worker achieving an expert status where the professional (Self) remains distant from the client (Other) (Chambon, 2013). The status of professional expert allows the social worker to determine what issues can be addressed, excluding the person needing support from the decision-making. One of the participant's in Darroch's research provides an illustrative example stating,

> We can't really advocate anyway because we don't have the time. It's just not part of our role, you know if someone is living in their sisters (sic) […] cold damp shitty house and it's all overcrowded that's Housing New Zealand, there is always some other part of government that deals with these issues. It's not us. And it has to be that way because otherwise we'd be taking on the world. (Darroch, 2017, p. 63)

In this example the professional social worker has decided what issues are within her role, and that these issues do not include what is likely to be of importance for the person living in substandard, overcrowded housing or the likely impacts upon the relationship between this person and their sister.

Within critical and radical social work there is a considerable amount of literature expressing concern about the negative, conservative effects of othering upon social work practice (Chambon, 2013; Hyslop, 2016b; Hyslop & Keddell, 2018; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009;

Morley et al., 2017; Russell, 2015, 2017; Timor-Shelvin, 2021; Timor-Shlevin & Benjamin, 2020).

The distinction between 'good' and 'bad' poor people and the 'deserving' or 'undeserving' poor

reflect a current conservative paradigm where the 'bad' and 'undeserving' need to be shown how

to change their moral impairments to the morally good characteristics of independence,

competitiveness, and industriousness. Consistent with this conservative paradigm social workers

have promoted this hegemonic definition of 'good' to poor 'clients' whilst keeping a professional

distance and separateness thereby maintaining an othering of 'professional' and 'client'.

Furthermore,

> Neo-liberal policy, which sacrifices poor people for economic growth, and the policy of
>
> new managerialism with its focus on outcomes, leads to the abandonment of the ethical
>
> aspect of social work practice, the individualisation of social problems and the othering of
>
> poor people. (Krumer-Nevo, 2016, p. 1805)

Paulo Freire developed a highly effective literacy programme working with Brazilian peasant

farmers in the 1960s (Freire, 2017). He continues to have a significant influence upon critical

theory (Crotty, 1998; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2011; Kincheloe et al., 2018; Peters & Besley,

2015). Consideration of his educational model offers an insightful understanding of solidarity. His

model rejected what he termed to be a 'banking model' of education where knowledge was

deposited into passive recipients. Rather, it was based upon reciprocal relationships between

teacher-student and student-teacher. There was a solidarity between students and teachers

where each was capable of teaching and learning from the other and all were invested in the

purpose of social change. The model rejects an active Subject (the professional expert) relating to

a passive Object (the 'client') (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 2017). This model can be transferred to social

work practice. An example of this possibility lies within the Poverty Aware Paradigm (PAP) detailed

by Krumer-Nevo, where "social workers can take a stand, adopt an approach of resisting poverty,

side with poor people in their day-to-day struggles, be positional and involved, and reshape practice as a vehicle of social justice" (Krumer-Nevo, 2016, p. 1805).

PAP assumes that social workers can learn much about the realities of poverty from the people experiencing it. Another important feature is an awareness that the actions and decisions of people experiencing poverty make sense within the context of their lived experiences. Therefore, solidarity includes a development of respectful relationships, standing with people experiencing poverty against injustice, and against the relatively powerful. Social workers have an ethical responsibility to consciously choose to make this stand.

2.7 A complex and unjust welfare benefit system – the need for welfare benefit advocacy

The Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) stated,

> Evidence is overwhelming that incomes are inadequate for many people, both those receiving a benefit and those in low-paid work. Current levels of support fail to cover even basic costs for many people, let alone allowing them to meaningfully participate in their communities**.** In New Zealand, poverty and benefit receipt are strongly associated. Māori, Pacific People, people with health conditions and disabilities, and young people are especially adversely affected. (p. 7)

WEAG describes the welfare benefit system and associated legislation as being complex and difficult to understand. WEAG argues that the system's use of punishment/sanctions, the 'clear signals' of neoliberal welfare reform, have been shown to be counterproductive. In short, WEAG recommended fundamental change to the welfare system based on whakamana tāngata, "at its heart our approach is about treating people with dignity"(Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 6). The fundamental change WEAG recommended has yet to occur.

In addition to class inequality, the current welfare system is monocultural (Stephens, 2019). Gray
& Crichton-Hill using sixteen focus groups and interviews with Māori and Pasifika women in
receipt of Sole Parent Support were able to argue that the treatment of these women by W&I staff
was consistent with "the broader context of racism in this country" (Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019, p.
5). This further amplifies the need for welfare change based upon the whakamana tāngata
approach (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019) and indicates a particular need for Māori and
Pasifika women to be supported when interacting with W&I staff.

A research project by Community Law Canterbury examining the legal needs of people on benefits
used a variety of research methods (Morton et al., 2014). These methods included fifty in-depth
interviews of representatives of relevant agencies and people receiving welfare benefit benefits,
analysis of statistical data from government agencies and community law centres, a literature
review, and an online survey. The research identified three key findings. The first was that the
main problem for the people receiving welfare benefit payments was poverty linked to inadequate
income. The second finding was that people applying for benefits experienced a power imbalance
when dealing with W&I at both the institutional and individual case manager levels where W&I
has the power to decide to approve or decline benefit applications. The third finding was that
there were both positive and negative experiences of interactions with W&I. However, negative
experiences and the stigma of being on a benefit overwhelmingly influenced these interactions.
The research also identified a discrepancy between W&I's policy of people receiving 'full and
correct entitlments' and people's experiences with W&I. Factors preventing full and correct
entitlement included the complexity of benefit eligibility criteria resulting in people not
understanding the criteria and not knowing what information to provide, a perception that case
managers withhold information about entitlements, reliance on internal policy that appeared
inconsistent with the legislation, and pressures on case managers. Arising from the impediments
to receipt of full and correct entitlements the research found that the "**most significant enabler to**

receiving entitlements was to have an advocate or informed support person to help apply for benefits and/or challenge Work and Income decisions" (emphasis added) (Morton et al., 2014, p. 9).

2.8 Issues arising from the literature review

This literature review has identified and discussed issues relevant to the research question without directly addressing them.

There is no universally agreed upon definition of poverty. Inherent in the acknowledged presence of poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand is a comparison between those who struggle to materially provide for themselves and their whānau and those who do not.

There is a considerable amount of literature regarding neoliberalism confirming that as both an economic and ideological project, aligned to the interests of free market capitalists, it has exacerbated poverty and has a hegemonic influence over all aspects of social policy. This influence has impacted upon social work education and practice and upon the welfare benefit system. A key feature of neoliberalism pertinent to both social work and the welfare benefit system is individual responsibility/individual fault which facilitates a denial of social causes of poverty. Also, of significance are the neoliberal claims as to the individual's responsibility to obtain paid work as the only way to get themselves out of poverty.

There is an identified, and intuitively obvious, link between poverty and the need for welfare benefit payments. Annually 630,000 people access welfare benefit payments in Aotearoa New Zealand this includes people in low-paid work. Approximately 60,000 people are receiving weekly sole parent support payments (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019). It is not clear how many children are living with adults who receive either weekly or other welfare benefit payments.

Social work's focus on the welfare of children is an example of the inherent links between the prevalence of poverty and social work education and practice. There is a consistent presence of poverty within the whānau of the children who come to the attention of social workers. However, poverty is unlikely to be an issue addressed by the social workers, rather they are more likely to pursue interventions based upon the perceived individual fault(s) of the children's parent(s) or caregiver(s). Their social work practice is consistent with neoliberal notions of individual fault. Awareness of poverty as a common feature in child welfare social work is seen as necessary within the literature but this awareness within the literature does not extend to knowledge of welfare benefit advocacy.

In general, there are two different forms of advocacy. The first, individual advocacy involves supporting an individual to access some form of tangible assistance. The second, is commonly referred to as cause or policy advocacy and relates to the furtherance of social justice. Collective advocacy incorporates cause or policy advocacy but extends this to include a solidarity between advocates and the people they work with. This research will henceforth use the terms individual advocacy and collective advocacy to distinguish between these two forms of interlinked advocacy and where necessary include the descriptor 'welfare benefit' for purposes of clarity. Furthermore, it is possible to develop a praxis where the knowledge gained from individual advocacy can inform and influence collective advocacy. Similarly, collective advocacy can inform and influence individual advocacy. At the core of these forms of advocacy is the notion of solidarity.

Literature addressing the long-standing debate within social work around the implications of othering, manifested as professional distancing has argued that this distancing is consistent with a conservative paradigm where the 'expert' social worker identifies and works on the problems of 'clients' thereby negating any need to address social issues, for example, issues related to poverty. Within the Poverty Aware Paradigm, a fundamentally different approach based on a solidarity

between social workers and the people experiencing poverty is recommended. This solidarity is consistent with the practice of welfare benefit advocacy.

Individual welfare benefit advocacy is needed to support people to access welfare benefit payments due to the complexity of legislated entitlements, discrepancies between the legislation and the policies and practices of W&I, and the mono-culturalism/institutional racism present within the welfare benefit system. Whilst these issues are problematic for individuals when applying for welfare benefit entitlements, they can also be the focus of collective welfare benefit advocacy.

It appears from this literature review that welfare benefit advocacy, either individual or collective has not been the subject of social work academic literature. The implication of this is that welfare benefit advocacy is unlikely to be a priority within social work education.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Epistemology

Epistemology is about understanding how knowledge is developed, what knowledge is possible and, in regard to research, the relationship between researcher and knowledge. Furthermore, it is necessary to identify a link between research epistemology and methodology for the research to be credible. (Crotty, 1998; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Thomas et al., 2020). Whilst there is a range of possible epistemologies two of the most commonly identified are objectivism and constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Crotty, 1998). Objectivism maintains there is a reality that exists independent of human consciousness. Reality can be identified and measured. Within an objectivist epistemology it is possible to identify a singular truth. Constructionism takes an opposite position maintaining meaningful reality is socially constructed. It is made through human social interaction and it is not possible to identify a singular truth (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Crotty, 1998). This research uses a constructionist epistemology.

3.2 Methodology

This research has required a flexible constructionist approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Crotty, 1998). Data has, where relevant, been coded either inductively where meaning has been developed from the data or deductively where meaning has been developed from my knowledge prior to undertaking the research or from reading relevant academic literature during the research process. By accepting that meaningful reality is socially constructed there is the implication that it is possible to change current social reality, and that change is possible and may be desirable. The above positionality statement sets out my personal perspective regarding the need for change. It, therefore, becomes necessary to expand upon a constructionist epistemology to incorporate the concept of social change. To assist in this Crotty

(1998) helpfully draws attention to links between epistemology and theoretical perspective identifying numerous theoretical perspectives including critical inquiry. Critical inquiry is based upon a core tenet that research should go beyond describing or explaining social reality to attempting to change social reality addressing issues of injustice. It is an understatement to observe there is a vast amount of literature regarding this point (Christians, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Custodio & Gathuo, 2020; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2011; Davis et al., 2019; Edmiston & Humpage, 2018; Freire, 2017; Kara, 2017; Kincheloe et al., 2018; Marx & Engels, 2010; Rouse & Woolnough, 2018; Torres, 2018). A moral imperative within the critical inquiry paradigm has been identified where

> We live in an unjust world in which inequalities are configured along predictable social
>
> lines of gender, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation and so on. We can and must do
>
> something to address the injustices we observe around us. (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 18)

Having linked an epistemology to a theoretical perspective further links to both methodology and method are needed (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Crotty, 1998).

Ethnography as a methodology is the study of culture without a political or social justice focus. It seeks to understand and describe (Liamputtong, 2020). Critical ethnography, a form of critical enquiry, is a methodology that has a political, social justice focus with an ethical obligation to bring about social change (Christians, 2018). The critical form of ethnography uses a range of methods that are associated with its non-critical form. These methods include, research conversations with participants, observation of participants and journaling (Powell, 2021). This research does not use these methods. However, my extensive experience of employment as a social worker has provided me with an in-depth familiarity with the culture of social work along with a commitment to social justice provides the basis for a critical ethnographic approach to this exploratory research. The methods used are detailed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Methods

4.1 Introduction

The methods used in this research have been developed to answer the research question – how well does social work education prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better? In line with the qualitative approach, a semi-structured interview guide was used. This is attached as Appendix B. This guide included four realistic welfare benefit advocacy scenarios relevant to interactions with W&I. The research participants' viewed the scenarios as realistic and this can be seen in their comments, as part of the analysis in the following chapter. The scenarios were followed up by a set of ten questions. The scenarios sought to explore research participants' knowledge and practice of welfare benefit advocacy. The questions sought to explore content of social work degree courses relevant to welfare benefit advocacy. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse data from the semi-structured interviews.

Coding has been either semantic where an obvious meaning exists, or latent where I have developed meaning from the data beyond a verbatim statement (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An example of this approach is the analysis of responses to benefit advocacy scenarios where it was necessary to analyse what the participants said and what they did not say. This particular analysis was assisted by using my personal knowledge of welfare benefit entitlements. These entitlements are set out in the Social Security Act 2018. They are both tangible and real whilst also being the product of social construction (Stephens, 2019) Therefore, I have reflexively asked myself what do the research participants know about specific benefit entitlements? And comparing this to what I know about welfare benefit entitlements. I have also reflexively asked what is the research participants' opinions and understanding of social constructs pertaining to people claiming benefit entitlements and the welfare benefit system? Also, comparing this to what are my opinions and

understanding of these social constructs. This reflexive questioning has required the use of

knowledge of the Social Security Act, experience of welfare benefit advocacy and of pre-existing

analysis of neoliberal welfare reform, it has been both inductive and deductive.

> Speaking in this vein sounds as if we create a methodology for ourselves – as if the focus
>
> of our research leads us to devise our own ways of proceeding that allow us to achieve
>
> our purposes. That, as it happens is precisely the case. (Crotty, 1998, p. 13)

The methodological flexibility of this research is consistent with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun

& Clarke, 2022). The reflexive thematic analysis approach used is detailed in this chapter.

4.2 Piloting of semi-structured interviews

Initial piloting of the research scenarios and questions contained in the semi-structured interview

guide occurred in early February 2021 with two social work colleagues at Mangere East Family

Services (MEFS) who had attended welfare benefit advocacy training I had facilitated as part of my

role at MEFS as social work practice leader. Their verbal feedback was that the scenarios were

accurate portrayals of real situations and would be difficult to answer without welfare benefit

advocacy training. The scenarios used were thought to be a useful method of beginning

discussions with research participants on the research question. The piloting also showed that

response to the four scenarios used would take no more than 30 minutes which was considered to

fit within a total interview time of 90 minutes. The research questions elicited responses that

detailed the lack of welfare benefit advocacy content in the courses attended by my two social

work colleagues. The piloting also showed that the full interview could be completed within 60 to

90 minutes. No significant changes to the interview guide occurred subsequent to the piloting.

4.3 Recruitment criteria and process

The initial criteria were that participants would be social workers who had graduated within three years, at the time of interview, from two of the five tertiary social work courses based in Auckland. These participants would be currently working in Auckland. These criteria were primarily based on convenience of access to the researcher. A further consideration was that participants would have some social work practice experience to base an opinion on the need for welfare benefit advocacy whilst also retaining relatively recent experience of social work education. The criteria limit the research findings to the Auckland-based social work degree courses the participants attended.

Due to a poor response to the research advertisement the criteria were extended to include a participant who graduated 6 years prior to the interview as she could potentially offer more insights from her experience regarding a need to know about welfare benefit entitlements. Another participant who had graduated in 2021 and had not begun social work employment was also included as she could potentially offer information as to more recent social work course content. Also, again due to the initial poor response to the advertisement, graduates from three of the five Auckland based social work courses participated in this research.

To recruit research participants an advertisement was placed with Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW). The advertisement can be found as Appendix C . The advertisement went out on fortnightly emails beginning on 12/2/21. The fortnightly emails continued until sufficient research participants were recruited. The advertisement was also sent out on ANZASW dedicated research emails on 22/2/21 and 17/5/21.

Difficulties in recruiting participants necessitated some changes to the initial recruitment criteria. Four of the first five research participants had attended welfare benefit advocacy training I had facilitated whilst I was the advocacy coordinator at Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP). The need to interview research participants who had not attended this training was identified. This

was important in terms of the reliability and credibility of the research thereby addressing the possible perception that I have unduly influenced participant responses. Therefore the criteria were expanded to include four participants who had not attended AAAP welfare benefit advocacy training. The lack of response from the advertisement placed through ANZASW was discussed with my supervisors and it was agreed that I should contact social work lecturers who I personally know to enquire if they would give the research advertisement to post-graduate students. A lecturer at Auckland University and another at UNITEC agreed to do this. No research participants were recruited from this.

A snowball strategy (Liamputtong, 2020) was then used whereby a personal friend and social work educator, acting as a key informant (Marshall, 1996) contacted a recent social work graduate who agreed to participate in the research. This graduate contacted another who agreed to participate in the research. An eighth participant was recruited by contacting another social work educator who contacted a recent graduate who also agreed to participate in the research. The outcome of this was the recruitment of a further three participants who had not attended AAAP welfare benefit advocacy training and whom I had not previously met.

Each participant was sent an Information Sheet (Appendix D) and subsequently signed a Consent Form (Appendix E).

4.4 Participant demographics

There were eight participants in the research. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect the anonymity of the participants. Five were women and three were men. Of the five women two identified as Māori, one identified as Pasifika and two did not specify ethnicity. Of the three men, two identified as Pākehā and one as Māori. One participant had attended the University of Auckland, three had attended Manukau Institute of Technology, and four had attended Unitec. The years the participants had graduated from their social work course ranged from 2014 to 2021.

Four of the participants had attended welfare benefit advocacy training that I had facilitated as part of my previous employment as the advocacy coordinator at Auckland Action Against Poverty and had therefore previously met me. The other four participants had not attended this training and had not previously met me.

Six of the participants were employed as social workers by not-for-profit/non-governmental organisations, one was employed by a District Health Board, working in a hospital, and one had yet to obtain social work employment.

4.5 Semi-structured interviews with recent social work graduates

The use of semi-structured interviews is common within qualitative research (Brinkmann, 2018). This provides both a structure through the use of an interview guide containing questions asked of all research participants and the flexibility to explore answers with follow-up questions during an interview (Bernard, 2013; Brinkmann, 2018). The interview guide used is attached as Appendix B. It has both the welfare benefit advocacy scenarios and the set of ten questions asked after the participants had responded to the scenarios.

4.6 Use of welfare benefit advocacy scenarios

Scenarios, otherwise referred to as vignettes, are a common feature of social work research where a realistic situation is presented to research participants and they are asked for their response (Flanagan, 2019; Gümüscü et al., 2018; Slabbert, 2018). Four scenarios were presented containing different situations where people needed to access different benefit entitlements. The purposes of this are to ascertain what knowledge of benefit entitlements the participants have, what knowledge they have of a benefit advocacy process and to provide an indication of the participants' practice regarding welfare benefit entitlement issues. I formulated these scenarios using my welfare benefit advocacy experience and they can be found in the interview guide.

The scenarios were read to each participant at their interview. Some participants asked to read the scenario themselves and were given the opportunity to do so. The participants were not given scenario details prior to the interview in an attempt to reflect the reality of meeting a person, the person then providing information about their welfare benefit entitlement needs, and the social worker then having to respond. The participants' responses were used to begin the semi-structured interview questions regarding the content of the participants' social work education pertaining to welfare benefit advocacy.

The scenario analysis considered both what was said by the participant and what was not said in relation to the formulated set of responses. Scenario analysis was also used to assist in the development of themes.

4.7 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) in a seminal article detail a six-phase thematic analysis (TA) process. These phases have been subsequently refined to, "1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report" (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 4).

The six-phase TA process as detailed by Braun and Clarke is not linear, the analytic process necessitates returning to earlier phases before proceeding to later phases to ensure the analysis of the data answers the research question. My experience during this research project has confirmed the need to return to earlier stages to clarify my analysis of the data and to facilitate development of themes using the research question to reduce over 1600 initial codes to over 70 code clusters, and from there develop five themes and five sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes were subsequently combined into two overarching themes with the intent to provide a coherent story developed from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is an explicitly subjective process.

Objectivity is seen as being incompatible with qualitative research using TA. "What is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognize them as decisions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). This infers a need to be explicit about my decision to undertake this research, my positionality and the theoretical framework used. These matters are discussed above. The thematic analysis methods adopted will be addressed below.

Since 2006, Braun and Clarke have further developed their conception of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun et al., 2019; Braun et al., 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2014, 2018). By 2019, Braun and Clarke had added the term reflexive to their understanding of TA. They emphasise the need for the researcher to continue to think about the evolving nature of the research process interpreting data to create a credible story that is consistent with the researcher's interpretation of the data. They clarified TA offers qualitative research a theoretical flexibility whilst requiring an explicit detailing of how the research had used TA and decisions made to use for example a constructionist epistemology, or latent and/or semantic analysis of data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This research uses a reflexive TA method and the six stages used are detailed below.

4.7.1 Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes.

Each interview was recorded using a speech-to-text computerised transcription application (Otter.ai PRO). I corrected errors by listening to the recorded interview and making necessary changes. Comments were added to these corrected transcripts to begin to identify relevant content as a start of theme development. On-going familiarisation occurred throughout the TA process as each interaction with a data transcript was an opportunity to further develop understanding of meaning.

4.7.2 Systematic coding

Data from each semi-structured interview was entered into a spreadsheet with columns headed, Interview, Page, Line, Code, Text, Quote, Cluster, Explanatory Note, Scenario and Question. The eight semi-structured interviews were initially coded separately, page and line numbers were in the workbook and the relevant interview text was added. The relevant text could have been an utterance, utterance fragment or word considered to contain something meaningful. Text was coded as meaningful even if it did not address the research question directly as it may provide some insight at a later stage. A quote column was used to identify potential quotes for potential use in the writing the report stage. A further cluster column was used to begin grouping data together. An explanatory note column was used to briefly clarify issues that I identified. Scenario and question columns were used to identify the relevant scenario or question from the semi-structured interview guide. An in-depth analysis of each interview resulted in the development of over 1600 codes. From these codes over 70 clusters were developed.

4.7.3 Generating initial themes from coded and collated data

With over seventy clusters I began to develop initial themes bringing together clusters and not including other clusters that were not relevant to the research question (Terry et al., 2017). I repeatedly asked myself reflexive questions, for example, does this cluster assist in answering the research question? And what is common amongst the clusters? To enable this process, I used the spreadsheet containing all eight interviews to create further spreadsheets for the four scenarios and each of the ten semi-structured research questions. Further spreadsheets were created to facilitate focus on code clusters enabling the development of initial themes, for example, 'child focus', 'include advocacy', and 'link theory/practice'. Using these spreadsheets, a document was developed for the four scenarios and each of the eight semi-structured interview questions and other documents were created for each of the ten questions from the semi-structured interview

guide. These documents contained relevant clusters with quotes from the data from each

interview and my comments. I began to write very brief summaries of my analysis of the data and

developed three initial themes and subthemes related to one of the three initial themes.

4.7.4 Developing and reviewing themes

Data from the above were then cut and pasted into sketch pads for each of the three initial

themes. I brought together quotes and my comments from each participant's responses to each of

the semi-structured interview guide questions using the filter of relevance to the research

question. This active process showed consistency of responses from the participants across the

questions.

4.7.5 Refining, defining, and naming themes

A reflexive process has been used to refine, define, and name themes. The process is recursive and

not linear (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This has facilitated the development of a credible story with

clear links to the data. Reflexivity during the writing the report stage initially assisted me to

develop two further themes and five sub-themes which added depth and clarity to the 'story'

being told. These candidate themes and sub-themes are listed below -

1. Individual welfare benefit advocacy is either not taught or not taught in sufficient detail.

2. It is important to include individual welfare benefit advocacy in social work education.

    Within this candidate theme there were five sub-themes, 'people are not accessing their

    welfare benefit entitlements', a toxic culture within W&I', 'need for advocacy support',

    'absence of links between social work theory and individual welfare benefit advocacy

    practice', and 'child welfare focus'.

3. The influence of neoliberalism.

4. Use realistic scenarios within welfare benefit advocacy teaching.

5. Need for an advocacy process.

Further reflexive thinking and discussion with my research supervisors facilitated the development

of two overarching themes which are 'individual welfare benefit advocacy is either not taught or

not taught in sufficient detail' and 'what should be taught'.

4.7.6 Writing the report

Writing the report is a part of the analytical process. In the writing there are further opportunities

to refine and define the themes. This is consistent with the recursive nature of reflexive thematic

analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Within reflexive thematic analysis it is possible to combine results and discussion into one

'analysis' section of the report thereby combining data extracts and literature to provide a credible

narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This report writing structure as provided by Braun & Clarke

(2022) has been usefully adapted for this thesis.

Chapter 5 Analysis (incorporating responses to welfare benefit advocacy scenarios, themes and literature)

The intention of my analysis is to answer the two parts of the research question – how well does social work education prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better? To answer the first part of the research question the analysis discusses and emphasises what the participants identified was not in their course content. The analysis also discusses what the participants identified was relevant, and to what extent, in their social work degree course content. Furthermore, the consequences of what was not taught are discussed. This is contained within Theme 1 'individual welfare benefit advocacy is either not taught or not taught in sufficient detail'.

The second part of the research question asks – what could be done better? Based upon data from the research participants, additions to social work course content are discussed. Commencing with participants' experiences of the positive difference made when they actively support someone applying for a welfare benefit entitlement, I set out a need for practical individual welfare benefit advocacy education and posit a need to link social work theory to the practice of welfare benefit advocacy that includes both individual and collective advocacy. The use of realistic welfare benefit scenarios as a tool for use in teaching these forms of advocacy is discussed. The child welfare focus within social work is used as an example of how welfare benefit advocacy is consistent with a significant field of current social work practice. A need for inclusion of a coherent welfare benefit advocacy process within social work education is postulated as this could enhance social work practice. This is contained within Theme 2, 'what should be taught'.

To assist in the overall analysis reference is made to pertinent literature.

5.1 Theme 1 Individual welfare benefit advocacy is either not taught or not taught in sufficient detail.

The identified gap in the literature where no academic literature relevant to the social work profession was found regarding a specific need for welfare benefit advocacy skills supports this theme. Essentially, if there is no academic literature on a topic it is unlikely to be a focus of tertiary education. Kevin, who attended the University of Auckland, states,

> My education in my experience did not teach anything around the particular applications of WINZ advocacy. So, I would not have been aware generally of any specific benefits, any specific payments, anything specific I should be asking for or skills even of relating to or talking with or advocating for tāngata in a WINZ environment.

He did not recall any reference made to the Social Security Act 2018. The lack of Social Security Act course content is significant because all of Aotearoa New Zealand's welfare benefit entitlements are contained within the Social Security Act 2018 and regulations, programmes and Ministerial directives deriving from this Act (Stephens, 2019). Knowledge of the range of benefit entitlements and their eligibility criteria can only be gained by familiarity with the Act. The participants describe either no reference to this Act within their courses or a minimal focus on it. Whereas seven of the participants referred to legislation relating to the welfare of children being taught.

Anna and Sally state that their MIT course did not include the Social Security Act. However, Mark refers to the Social Security Act 1964 being included in a Politics of Change paper, "you were somewhat analysing legislation and understanding the politics of it without necessarily getting into the use of it." He also states the Act was given as a reading. An inference of this is the course content Mark describes does not link the theory or politics within this Act to the practice of individual welfare benefit advocacy.

The four participants who qualified from Unitec provided a more diverse range of responses.

Helen, who qualified in 2014 was unequivocal that "There was no theory or practice for MSD."

There was an Advocacy paper that was available for the other three participants who qualified in

either 2019 or 2020. Whilst Carol did not recall the content of this paper, Margaret recalls "we did

look a little bit around entitlements and getting people what they need to work, what they

needed. But yeah, it wasn't, there wasn't a lot of it." Regarding the Social Security Act Margaret

stated, "We didn't really look at the Social Security Act itself specifically on the course."

John, differentiating between individual and collective advocacy, stridently states

> So, my social work course wasn't about this, and this is the thing that pissed me off a little
>
> bit, there wasn't enough advocacy, this is what advocacy looks like. Sys, systemic change,
>
> advocacy more look like fighting the government, you know. So, so there was systemic
>
> change. Advocacy didn't consider your everyday battle with WINZ.

He expands on this by describing a course focus on forms of advocacy where the purpose is to

achieve social justice and very little focus on individual advocacy. He also talks about a focus on

macro-analysis and refers to minimal focus on the practicalities of individual welfare benefit

advocacy within Social Security Act course content, stating,

> It taught you how the individual was, you know, was, was being affected by the macro,
>
> you know. It definitely told you that, but it didn't tell you what you needed to know. Yeah,
>
> okay, its good you know why it's happening. But it's the practical stuff, you know like, oh,
>
> like the, like, like, like for instance, so Social Policy we did the Social Security Act and we
>
> spent, I don't know a lecture on that, you know but the rest of it was about systems and,
>
> yeah, yeah.

John is describing an absence of a link between social analysis and the ability to support people

with their immediate needs to access all of their welfare benefit entitlements. The absence of links

between social work theory and individual welfare benefit advocacy is discussed below and the need to link social work theory and individual welfare benefit advocacy practice is further discussed in Theme 2.

In the absence of welfare benefit advocacy course content some students saw welfare benefit advocacy training provided by Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP) as an alternative; Mark and Anna both graduated in 2020 from MIT and were supported by lecturers to attend the AAAP training. Margaret also attended AAAP welfare benefit advocacy training when attending Unitec. Helen attended the AAAP training after graduating from Unitec in 2014. John, when attending the Unitec social work course, wanted to attend the AAAP training says. "I just couldn't fit it in. I was working full-time. I was trying to do a degree." John's situation raises questions about the viability of students undertaking training in addition to course expectations and students' other commitments. My experience as the AAAP advocacy coordinator and a facilitator of this training attended by the participants adds a further perspective. AAAP's primary purpose in running the training was to recruit additional volunteer advocates. The social work courses that did encourage students to attend AAAP training could be seen to be sending a contradictory message to them where welfare benefit advocacy training was a useful adjunct to social work but it was not 'real' social work to be included in formal social work education as recognised by the New Zealand Social Work Registration Board. This message is consistent with the concern raised by Krumer-Nevo et al. (2009) that supplying material assistance, in this instance welfare benefit payments is neither 'real' nor 'professional' social work.

This global definition of social work is used by the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social
>
> change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of

> people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for
>
> diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social
>
> sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and
>
> structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (Aotearoa New Zealand
>
> Association of Social Workers, n.d., para. 1)

To be consistent with this definition there needs to be a theoretical basis to the actions of social

workers that has an explicit social justice purpose. The theoretical base to individual welfare

benefit advocacy will be further discussed within this theme.

Given the lack of individual welfare benefit advocacy course content, as indicated by the

participants in this research, it is rather self-evident that there would be few, if any, links between

social work theory and individual welfare benefit advocacy within the three social work courses

the participants attended. However, the above literature review included reference to a clear link

between poverty and the welfare benefit system (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019). It is

therefore useful to consider the participants' experiences of theory pertaining to poverty and its

causes.

The three participants from MIT provided differing perspectives. Mark speaks of lecturers teaching

about neoliberalism, Marxism, and colonisation. Anna identifies a

> Te Tiriti o Waitangi paper, understanding the journey of the people. So, looking at history,
>
> where Māori were and where they are. And the shift of that, and how poverty is now
>
> quite prominent within Māori communities.

Anna is describing causative links between breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the prevalence of

poverty within Māori communities. Whereas Sally, who qualified a year after Mark and Anna,

identifies a lack of poverty-related theory, and states,

> I think with our degree, it just gave us an eye-opener that, you know, poverty is real. Some
>
> of our students did actually get to see that on, when we did community service, you know,
>
> even doing our Auckland City Mission, and going around, you know.

She added that regarding the causes of poverty, "Like in our course, we didn't really discuss much

about it. It was only brought up to our attention when we did, you know, community service. So,

yeah, that's about it." The 'community service' she refers to consisted of "giving out food parcels

and stuff like that". She is describing an almost total lack of any course content pertaining to the

existence of poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the absence of alternatives, she is taught a

charity-based response to poverty is appropriate.

The one participant from the University of Auckland and the four from Unitec are clear that their

courses included theory that explained why poverty exists including course content regarding

major historical sociological figures and the impacts of colonisation. Karl Marx is a major historical

sociological figure and is "recognised as one of the principal moulders of modern thought" (Crotty,

1998, p. 115). However, Carol sees no connection between Marxist theory and individual welfare

benefit advocacy. She expresses her frustration with Marxist theory, and questions its relevance

stating,

> Yeah, Marxism, you know, and, and then you, you go away and you research the theories,
>
> and then you can't write an assignment on that. Whereas doing an assignment on here's
>
> your case study, what benefits would you do, or what would, where's the advocacy or
>
> where would you direct this client to, or how would this look as if this was your client?

Marx provided a critique of the exploitation and alienation inherent within capitalism (Crotty,

1998; Freire, 2017; Harrington, 2005; Marx & Engels, 2010) which could assist in explaining links

to, and the motivation for, neoliberal welfare reform. Helen expresses a similar frustration to that

of Carol, questioning theory arising from historical course content stating,

> They reverted all the way back to the industrial, the industrial revolution and but it never
>
> – and colonisation, like they reverted back to so much historical stuff, which is, kind of, I
>
> would kind of not agree with but there are probably aspects of that have impacted today
>
> but not full aspects, you know, and so today's poverty nothing. Nothing really, […] I don't
>
> think anyone could explain it.

Both Carol and Helen indicate that significant social theory, for example Marxist theory or a critique of colonisation has a limited influence on their social work practice. Helen indicates that the causes of poverty are inexplicable and, if so, infers that theory in general has little practical use in relation to the existence of poverty. However, another significant social theory is neoliberalism which emphasises individual fault and has influenced the current welfare benefit policy and practice (Bennett, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2010; Rebstock et al., 2011).

Neoliberal capitalism and its hegemonic influence has been the subject of considerable academic social work focus (Hyslop, 2016a; Keddell, 2017; Morley et al., 2017; Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021; Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020; Timor-Shlevin & Benjamin, 2020). In contrast, neoliberal welfare reform has been the subject of very little academic social work focus (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016). It is significant that the participants did not make connections between the inherent exploitation of capitalism, its current neoliberal form and resultant neoliberal welfare reform. Some participants identified neoliberalism was included in their course content but this does not appear to extend to any in-depth discussion about neoliberal welfare reform. Consistent with this reform is the presence of a toxic culture within W&I.

Morton et al. (2014) reported "beneficiaries described the dehumanising effect of the delivery of welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand" (p. 55). They also found that W&I case managers could interact with people claiming welfare entitlements either negatively or positively,

> However, many beneficiaries described overwhelmingly negative treatment they had
>
> received as clients of Work and Income, descriptions that were supported by
>
> representatives of community agencies. This negative treatment had a pervasive influence
>
> on their interactions with the benefit system at all levels. (p. 55)

Furthermore, they found "a widely held view amongst those that we interviewed that there is a

culture of withholding entitlement information" (p. 56) and that some people would not apply for

welfare benefits to minimise their contact with W&I preferring to rely upon charity. The research

conducted by Morton et al. under the auspices of the Canterbury Community Law Centre is

consistent with the data from the research participants.

Margaret describes how people are treated at W&I,

> Oh, really poorly. I think there's just isn't, there's, there is quite a toxic environment in, in
>
> Work and Income and it filtrates through and so even people who come into work with a,
>
> with best plans and wanting to help people get sucked into that kind of system which
>
> doesn't treat people respectfully, is judgmental, doesn't believe what people are saying.

She is suggesting that well-intentioned staff are likely to succumb to pressure to conform to a

prevailing culture within W&I.

Kevin describes his impression of how the welfare system treats beneficiaries and links this back to

the need for individual welfare benefit advocacy support.

> Generally, not very well, generally. Not wanting to understand where they're from, they
>
> are someone who has come for help but may not be deserving of that help. Or the
>
> impression I get is more this person is an annoyance. This person is someone I just have to
>
> deal with today. As opposed to this as a person who has a right and should live a healthy,

whole, meaningful life, and I want to help them access that. Whereas when I am with a person, they seem to somehow recognise that a little bit better.

Kevin is talking about a distinction he has observed W&I staff make between people deserving of welfare benefit entitlements and those who are undeserving of these entitlements. Other participants variously described W&I staff as gatekeepers, behaving as if the benefits paid was their own money, treating people as numbers, withholding information, and treating people inhumanely.

Both Margaret and Carol describe using the review of decision (ROD) process to challenge this toxic culture. The ROD process challenges W&I decisions to decline applications for benefit payments. Carol explains why she pursued a ROD when supporting a woman with a child whose partner was in Samoa and unable to return to Aotearoa New Zealand because of Covid – 19 travel restrictions,

Because we feel that their decision isn't justificated [justified]. That they need to know that the context of this case isn't valid. So, in the context of they have her on a job seeker benefit where she is a solo mother. But her partner is stuck in Samoa and can't get a visa to come because we've got closed borders. So, they won't transfer her to a sole parent. They say she's, is, she got a partner so she's, can only do that, be the job seeker which isn't for a mother who has no other income to protect, to feed her and her child, isn't a lot of money.

The presence of a toxic culture emphasises the need for advocacy support in an environment where there is "an inherent imbalance of power between beneficiaries and the government department that makes decisions about their entitlements" (Morton et al., 2014, p. 55). Aligned to the above global definition of social work there needs to be a theoretical basis to an understanding of this toxic culture.

The neoliberal focus on the individual can be seen in the explanations given for the toxic culture within W&I. Participants refer to their experiences of working with a 'good' W&I case manager who would assist people to access benefit entitlements. Helen describes her experience of supporting a woman to apply for unsupported child benefit where one W&I case manager had declined the application but a second case manager approved it. She states, "we were just lucky to get a good case manager." Carol differentiates between good case managers and others where the good case manager will treat people with respect and dignity whilst others are "very quick to judge, and very quick to say 'no', and very quick to assume. So, I think it is the luck of the draw on what person you get. Some are very rude". She later adds, "I think it's, it's all about personality and where they sit". Kevin expresses this individualised explanation, "So, I think a lot of it comes down to that individual caseworker, human judgment, human error." He, along with other research participants, does not refer to the possibility of a dominant neoliberal discourse (Bettache & Chiu, 2019) or neoliberal welfare reform (Baker & Davis, 2017; Bennett, 2012; Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2010; Rebstock et al., 2011; Whitworth, 2021) as factors contributing to a toxic culture. These participants appear to construct an argument that the individual fault of W&I staff explains how people claiming welfare benefits are treated rather than an explanation consisting of social analysis. Such an analysis could contextualise social workers' experience of their interactions with W&I and the people needing welfare benefit entitlements. It could inform the practice of individual welfare benefit advocacy.

 The participants variously describe either no or minimal content within their social work degree courses on individual welfare benefit advocacy. Whilst describing a toxic W&I culture they attribute this to the individual faults of W&I staff. Most refer to course content pertaining to some, or all of these; colonisation, breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Marxism and neoliberalism. However, this theoretical base does not appear to facilitate an understanding of the effects of neoliberal welfare reform as seen in the W&I toxic culture.

 The following analysis of the research participants' responses to four individual welfare benefit scenarios assists in understanding the consequences of the lack of welfare benefit advocacy course content and offers examples of the participants' practice.

5.1.1 Analysis of individual welfare benefit scenarios

Each semi-structured interview began by presenting four welfare benefit advocacy scenarios. As previously stated in the Methods section, these scenarios are used to ascertain what knowledge of benefit entitlements the participants have, what knowledge they have of a benefit advocacy process and to provide an indication of the participants' practice regarding benefit entitlement issues.

5.1.1.1 Scenario 1 - Food grants and Review of decision

"A sole parent with 4 children is about to move into Kainga Ora (Housing NZ) housing. She identifies a need for a $450 food grant. Work and Income has approved a $200 food grant because the sole parent has had 3 previous food grants in the past 5 months totalling $350.
As the family's social worker what actions would you take?"

This scenario deals with issues pertaining to food grants included in the special needs grants (SNG) programme. This scenario also raises issues pertaining to use of the review of decision process. Eligibility for a food grant requires that an "immediate need" exists and to exceed stated limits an "exceptional circumstance" exists (Stephens, 2019). The stated limit in this instance is $550 in a 26-week period (Work and Income, n.d.-b). To exceed this stated limit necessitates W&I using its discretionary powers as contained in the SNG programme. The same discretionary powers are also in the Ministerial direction on advance payments of instalments of benefit (Work and Income, 2021).

Awareness of this discretion is at the core of individual welfare benefit advocacy pertaining to the

SNG and this Ministerial direction. The SNG programme specifies that W&I staff in their use of

discretion must consider if an 'emergency situation' exists. The emergency situation then gives rise

to an 'immediate need'. To determine if such a situation exists the following matters are to be

considered, was the situation predictable and could the person have taken realistic steps to

provide for that situation. Also, what would be the adverse consequences of declining an

application for a special needs grant, in this instance a food grant (Work and Income, n.d.-b). All of

the above food grant eligibility criteria are open to subjective interpretation.

In this scenario an advocate could argue that moving into social housing means that an immediate

need exists to buy essential food and grocery items. It would be possible to argue that moving into

social housing constitutes both an exceptional circumstance and an emergency situation,

therefore, W&I should consider the adverse consequences of declining the full amount of food

grant applied for. Identification of an immediate need, an exceptional circumstance and an

emergency situation provide the basis to assertively argue for approval of the $450 food grant that

has been applied for, and which is in excess of the stated 26-week limit. If W&I declines to approve

the full amount of food grant that the sole parent in this scenario needs then that decision can be

formally reviewed using the review of decision process (Stephens, 2019).

The review process begins with lodging a review of decision (ROD). The review is then considered

by a W&I manager if that manager agrees with the original decision the review goes to the local

Ministry of Social Development Regional Office where a detailed report is compiled that provides

the justification for the original decision (Russell & Bradford, 2022). The next stage in the review

process is a Benefit Review Committee (BRC) hearing where the Ministry's report is presented and

the person and their advocate can present their case. The BRC is comprised of two Ministry

employees and a community representative and is therefore not an independent body (Stephens,

2019). There are legal rights to appeal decisions made by a BRC to the Social Security Appeal

Authority that has the status of a commission of inquiry and then on to the High Court (Stephens,

2019). The review process is heavily weighted in favour of Work and Income/Ministry of Social

Development however, "By consistently lodging RODs over a period of time you significantly

increase the chances of the people you are supporting getting a 'yes' from Work and Income"

(Russell & Bradford, 2022, p. 28). The ROD process involves W&I/MSD staff in lengthy

administrative processes that they want to avoid. The willingness to use this process with the

support and understanding of the people who have applied for a declined welfare benefit

payment is a legitimate advocacy strategy. It is an expression of solidarity (Russell & Bradford,

2022).

Table 2 below sets out issues pertaining to this scenario and the participants' awareness of

relevant issues. The Table records the participants who made no reference to an issue. This lack of

reference to an issue infers the issue would not be considered by a participant when engaged in

welfare benefit advocacy. The numbers refer to each participant individually.

Table 2
Participant awareness of scenario 1 issues

Issue	Fully Aware	Partially Aware	No reference to issue
Aware of food grant criteria		1,5	2,3,4,6,7,8
Aware of discretion		3,5	1,2,4,6,7,8
Aware of Review of Decision process	7	1,2,5	3,4,6,8
Would lodge Review of Decision	7		1,2,3,4,5,6,8
Would discuss Review of Decision with person			1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

Table 2 indicates the research participants are predominantly unaware of the eligibility criteria for

a food grant, the specifics of the discretion associated with food grants, and the review of decision

(ROD) process. Their ability to effectively advocate for $450 food grant the woman has identified

she needs will be restricted by this lack of awareness. Participant 1, Kevin, who was partially aware of food grant criteria and of the ROD process, and made no reference to discretion states

> In this instance it is tricky that they do have a history of accepting food grants because I know WINZ (Work and Income) is often very reluctant, or at least their caseworkers are very reluctant to hand out more money than they are officially allowed. My impression is that WINZ has no cap on what a food grant actually is [...] I would be asking to talk to a service manager to make a special exemption. […] My impression is WINZ food grant is specifically for if they are relying on a food parcel for food they should go through WINZ for a food grant.

Regarding the option of lodging a review of decision Kevin states,

> I could push for a review of decision if I'm very unhappy. I think, in this case, personally, I probably wouldn't have because I know that WINZ will still try and stick to their policies. Yeah, so I think I would leave it there.

Kevin indicates that he would end his advocacy for a $450 food grant if a service manager declines to approve it. He does not present an argument based on the discretion within the SNG programme referred to above.

Also, only one participant was fully aware of the option to challenge a W&I decision to decline approval for the amount of food grant the person identified as being needed by lodging a ROD. She identifies the ROD process is a formal method of challenging W&I decisions. The other participants made no reference to this issue. Furthermore, no participant referred to discussing the option of lodging a review of decision with the woman. This lack of reference to the issues identified in Table 2 indicates a lack of awareness of the issues.

5.1.1.2 Scenario 2 - Advance payments and temporary additional support

> "You visit a family (2 parents with 5 children) at their 3-bedroom home. The parents and the children are sleeping on mattresses on the floor. You are told they are in rent arrears totalling $4000 and have been given notice to attend a Tenancy Tribunal hearing. The weekly rent is $680. You are also shown a letter from Work and Income stating the family owe Work and Income $10,000 and are repaying this debt to Work and Income at the rate of $50 per week. The parents have no paid work and receive job seeker support, accommodation supplement, winter energy payment and family tax credit.
>
> As the family's social worker what actions would you take?"

This scenario deals with a family's needs for support from W&I to purchase beds, pay rent arrears and reduce weekly debt repayments to W&I. All these needs can be addressed using the Ministerial direction on advance payments (Work and Income, 2021). W&I must decide if the person applying for the advance payment has a particular immediate need, this is defined as "a particular immediate need for an essential item or service" (Stephens, 2019, p. 348). What constitutes a particular immediate need is not further defined. Discretion within the SNG programme is discussed previously in Scenario 1. The Ministerial direction on advance payments of instalments of benefit allows for the same high degree of discretion as contained within the SNG (Stephens, 2019). The discretion available to W&I is set out at clause 6.3.3 of the Ministerial direction (Work and Income, 2021) and uses the same wording as in the SNG. The numerous needs of the family in this scenario can only be addressed with the use of discretion. Without discretion they cannot access an advance to buy beds, their rent arrears cannot be paid, they face the prospect of homelessness and the $50 weekly debt repayment to W&I cannot be reduced. Consistent with the discretion criteria, there is a need to identify the adverse consequence(s) of declining the applications for support.

This scenario also raises the issue of applying for temporary additional support. Temporary additional support is a weekly payment subject to review at thirteen-week intervals and "is seen as a last resort to alleviate the financial hardship of people whose essential costs cannot be met from

their chargeable income" (Stephens, 2019, p. 319). Without going on to provide definitions of 'essential costs' or 'chargeable income' it is sufficient to say that high rent is an essential cost and 'chargeable income' includes welfare benefit payments. In this instance an application for temporary additional support should be made.

Table 3 below sets out issues pertaining to this scenario and the participants' awareness of relevant issues. The Table records the participants who made no reference to an issue. This lack of reference to an issue infers the issue would not be considered by a participant when engaged in welfare benefit advocacy. The numbers refer to each participant individually.

Table 3
Participant awareness of Scenario 2 issues

Issue	Fully Aware	Partially Aware	No reference to issue
Aware of advance payment criteria	-	-	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
Aware of discretion	-	-	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
Aware of potential eligibility for rent arrears advance payment	5	7	1,2,3,4,6,8
Aware of potential to reduce weekly W&I debt repayment	5	1,2,7	3,4,6,8
Aware of potential to access advance payment to buy beds	5	1,2,4,6,7	3,8
Aware of potential to apply for temporary additional support	7	-	1,2,3,4,5,6,8

None of the research participants refer to either advance payment eligibility criteria or to the discretion associated with the Ministerial direction on advance payments of instalments of benefit. Regarding the lack of any reference to discretion within this scenario, it is of interest to note that two participants, Mark and Margaret, had some awareness of the relevance of discretion within Scenario 1. Both make subsequent references to discretion during their interviews. One participant was fully aware of the potential for W&I to provide an advance payment to pay the rent arrears owed, another participant had some awareness of this. Four

participants made no reference to this being an option and two did not think W&I could assist.

Participant 2, Helen stated, "Not sure whether an advance through Work and Income would help with that. Nah, they wouldn't do that." These findings suggest that without individual welfare benefit advocacy as part of their degree courses social workers are likely to be unable to support families with significant rent arrears to access advance payment entitlements from W&I to pay those arrears.

Four of the participants made no reference to the potential to reduce a $50 per week debt repayment to W&I. One participant incorrectly stated that he thought the minimum debt repayment is $10 per week. Participant 3, Mark states, "But with regards to that debt […] I'm actually not sure how I would help […] This highlights to me that none of this is taught to us in the degree." These findings also suggest that many social workers are unaware of this potential to reduce weekly debt repayments and are likely to be unable to assist in alleviating this aspect of ongoing weekly financial hardship.

Six of the participants had, at least, some awareness of the potential to access an advance payment to buy beds but when this is linked to the family's existing debt and the lack of awareness of discretion it would be reasonable to assume that difficulties in accessing this advance payment would arise. There are stated limits as to the total amount of advance payments a person can have and there is a stated time limit as to when advances should be repaid (Work and Income, 2021). To go beyond these limits W&I must use its discretion. A purpose of individual welfare benefit advocacy is to get W&I to use its discretion to meet the immediate needs of people. Participant 4, Anna, when discussing the process of applying for an advance to buy beds acknowledges, "I'm not entirely sure what it's called. But to my understanding going into Work and Income with quotes for what the family need." Anna is able to describe an initial step in the process but does not refer to the necessary use of discretion.

Seven of the participants made no reference to the option to apply for temporary additional

support to assist with high rent costs. This suggests a lack of awareness of this option.

5.1.1.3 Scenario 3 - Accommodation supplement, child disability allowance, disability

allowance, arrears payments and temporary additional support.

"A family (2 parents and 3 children) has been referred to you. One of the children who is 6 years old has severe autism. The mother works full-time earning $1200 per week before tax. She has had the same wage for 3 years. They have been in their current house for the past 2 years and pay weekly rent of $700. When they first moved into this house they got a food grant from Work and Income and have received several other food grants from Work and Income since then. They receive no on-going payments from Work and Income.

As the family's social worker what actions would you take?"

This scenario deals with issues pertaining to the accommodation supplement, child disability

allowance, disability allowance, arrears payments, and temporary additional support.

Accommodation supplement is an ongoing weekly payment for housing costs including rent.

People in paid work are potentially eligible for accommodation supplement based on their income

and assets. (Stephens, 2019). Using the MSD benefit eligibility calculator shows eligibility for a

weekly accommodation supplement payment of up to $248 (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.-

b) based on the following information, that the mother was aged 35, the father was aged 33 and

the children were aged 10, 8 and 6 years old, and were living in South Auckland. Accommodation

supplement amounts will vary depending upon where in Aotearoa New Zealand a family lives

(Stephens, 2019). This family are also potentially eligible for a backdated accommodation

supplement payment because the scenario provided states "They have been in their current house

for the past 2 years and pay weekly rent of $700. When they first moved into this house, they got

a food grant from Work and Income." It is therefore reasonable to assume there would have been

a conversation between a W&I case manager and the parent(s) when they first applied for a food

grant 2 years ago. During that conversation the case manager should have proactively discussed

the family's situation including their housing costs and the health of their children. Stephens

(2019) refers to the Ministry of Social Development's duty to provide active assistance and provide

correct advice about possible benefit entitlements. If the Ministry does not do this and a mistake is

made, then there is the possibility to back-date a payment to the date the mistake was made. She

also refers to "an influential High Court decision" that states "The Director-General should be

proactive in seeing to welfare, and not defensive or bureaucratic." (Stephens, p. 113). On this basis

this family is potentially eligible for an accommodation supplement arrears payment of over

$22,500.

Child disability allowance (CDA) is an ongoing weekly payment to the parent or caregiver of a child

with a serious disability and is not income tested (Stephens, 307). Section 79 of the Social Security

Act 2018 defines a child with a serious disability as a child that "(a) has a disability; and (b) because

of that disability needs **constant care and attention;** (emphasis in original) and (c) is likely to need

that care and attention permanently or for a period exceeding 12 months." (Stephens, 309). The 6-

year-old child with severe autism referred to in this scenario meets the above criteria. As CDA is

not income tested, the mother's income is not relevant to eligibility. The rate of CDA as of 1 April

2022 is $52.79 (Work and Income). As stated above it is reasonable to expect a W&I case manager

to enquire about the health of the children in the family. If the case manager did not enquire

about this when the family first applied for a food grant that constitutes an error as mentioned

above and provides the potential for eligibility for a CDA back-dated arrears payment of

approximately $5000. In addition to CDA there is a possibility that the autistic child has on-going

health related costs which would be covered by a disability allowance. It is possible to receive CDA

and disability allowance for the same child.

The family in this scenario are missing out on total weekly benefit payments of up to $266 and

have potential eligibility for back-dated arrears payments of over $27,000. There is also a potential

eligibility for temporary additional support to assist with high rent costs and other essential costs (see Scenario 2 above).

Table 4 below sets out issues pertaining to this scenario and the participants' awareness of relevant issues. The Table records the participants who made no reference to an issue. This lack of reference to an issue infers the issue would not be considered by a participant when engaged in welfare benefit advocacy. The numbers refer to each participant individually.

Table 4
Participant awareness of Scenario 3 issues

Issue	Fully Aware	Partially Aware	No reference to issue
Aware of CDA eligibility criteria		2,3,5	1,4,6,7,8
Aware of potential AS eligibility for family with paid work	7	5	1,2,3,4,6,8
Aware of potential eligibility for arrears payments			1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
Aware of disability allowance criteria	7	1	2,3,4,5,6,8
Aware of potential temporary additional support eligibility			1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

Five of the participants made no reference to being aware of the child disability allowance (CDA) criteria. Participant 8, Sally whilst indicating a desire to help states "I feel like the mother can actually be entitled to a lot more. I feel like the child with autism needs more support." She makes no reference to any particular benefit entitlement. Without this awareness it would be difficult to support someone to apply for the CDA.

Six of the participants made no reference to potential eligibility for accommodation supplement for a family with paid work, thereby lessening the likelihood that the family would apply for this payment. Participant 6, John states,

> I'm not sure on that one. I'm, again I would kind of, I would automatically I think that
>
> WINZ would say. 1200 a week is just a lot of money you should be managing that a lot
>
> better just, just because I've, I've kind of tried and fought tooth and nail, you know, with
>
> this. You have to sometimes […] you know everything's based off your past experiences
>
> with them. So, I'd rather try and find something for them that could, could get to them
>
> immediately than even, even consider WINZ. But, yeah, I would go and try my best.

He acknowledges his lack of knowledge about accommodation supplement eligibility and alludes to his expectation that W&I would attribute the family's situation to individual fault, in this instance the inability to manage their finances. He refers to previous negative experiences with W&I and his preference to avoid interactions with W&I.

The participants' responses to the other benefit issues raised by this scenario indicate an inability to provide effective individual welfare benefit advocacy. None of the participants refer to the possibility of eligibility for arrears payments thereby lessening the likelihood of an application being made and the family not receiving a substantial arrears payment. Six of the participants make no reference to disability allowance criteria. None of the participants refer to a potential eligibility for temporary additional support.

5.1.1.4 Scenario 4 - Unsupported child benefit and arrears payments

"A grandmother contacts you because she is in rent arrears with Kainga Ora. She tells you that she is struggling with bills because she has 2 grandchildren to care for. These grandchildren have been in her care for the past year. The children's parents live overseas and both have on-going drug abuse problems. She went to Work and Income when the grandchildren came into her care and was told to go to Inland Revenue to get financial help. When she talked with someone from Inland Revenue she was told to go back to Work and Income. She didn't understand what she had to do and gave up trying to get any financial help for the care of her grandchildren.

As the family's social worker what actions would you take?"

This scenario focuses on eligibility for unsupported child benefit (UCB) and consequent eligibility for an arrears payment. The criteria for eligibility for UCB are contained within Section 46 of the Social Security Act 2018. There is a need for there to be evidence of a breakdown in the child's family that means the natural parents are unable to care for the child and that there is an intention for the person applying for UCB to be the principal caregiver for at least one year. The Act provides no definition of what constitutes a family breakdown (Stephens, 2019).

In this scenario there is a clear family breakdown and the children have already been in the grandmother's care for a year. Dependent upon the age of the children, as of 1 April 2022 weekly UCB rates vary from $254.95 for children under 5 years old to $296.42 for children aged 14 years or older (Work and Income). This grandmother is missing out on a weekly UCB payment and is also potentially eligible for a back-dated arrears payment of over $13,000.

Table 5 below sets out issues pertaining to this scenario and the participants' awareness of relevant issues. The Table records the participants who made no reference to an issue. This lack of reference to an issue infers the issue would not be considered by a participant when engaged in individual welfare benefit advocacy. The numbers refer to each participant individually.

Table 5

Participant awareness of Scenario 4 issues

Issue	Fully Aware	Partially Aware	No reference to issue
Aware of UCB eligibility criteria	7	2,4,5	1,3,6,8
Aware of potential UCB arrears payment			1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

Four of the participants made no reference to awareness of unsupported child benefit eligibility criteria. Participant 4, Anna incorrectly asserts

I think first and foremost we have to establish if those children are in her care legally. So, for her to obtain some sort of financial assistance whether she's their full-time carer, let's go through a Court system where she has been appointed carer. It potentially sounds like that hasn't happened. Hence why she's probably not receiving any financial support through Work and Income.

UCB eligibility criteria do not include a need for any Court process to establish custody (Stephens, 2019). It is my experience that W&I staff often mistakenly require this Court process to have occurred and it is necessary to challenge this misconception. Anna goes on to describe her work with a grandmother who is caring for her grandchildren

Because it's kind of relevant to a case that I've just picked up with a nana who's just had her children in her care but we're financially supporting her with food at the moment. And so that's where the thinking of that coming through the Courts and knowing that she's legally got custody of her grandchildren, has now set a pathway she can pursue some financial support through Work and Income. What that looks like is new to me again, I'd have to research it myself.

She gives an example of how the misconception that a Court process to establish custody is part of the UCB criteria has delayed the application process for the UCB. A social work service based on this misconception has provided food for a grandmother and her grandchildren rather than proactively supporting her to receive the UCB. The outcome of any custody Court process should not delay payment of the UCB.

None of the participants referred to the potential eligibility of an unsupported child benefit arrears payment. This infers that an application for arrears would not be made, and a potentially substantial arrears payment would be foregone.

5.2 Discussion of participants' responses to scenarios

The above scenarios raised ten individual welfare benefit advocacy issues directly related to provisions within the Social Security Act 2018 or programmes and Ministerial directives deriving from that Act. It is difficult to think of any field of social work where some of these issues would not arise. Tables 2-5 above strongly indicate a lack of relevant knowledge amongst most of the participants. Reiterating Mark's comment, "this highlight to me the fact that none of this is taught to us in the degree" suggests that the participants are unlikely to effectively support people to access all their lawful benefit entitlements. The clear inference is that effective individual welfare benefit advocacy relies upon some knowledge of the Social Security Act 2018. It will be further argued in Theme 2 that knowledge of lawful entitlements needs to be incorporated into a framework of a coherent advocacy process. The scenario responses indicate individual welfare benefit advocacy is complex, and without an understanding of this complexity, social workers will find it difficult to support people to access their full welfare benefit entitlements. The possible use of welfare benefit advocacy scenarios in social work education will be discussed in Theme 2.

The analysis of the participants' responses to the above welfare benefit advocacy scenarios suggests that the people they do support are not accessing everything they are entitled to. This is not unexpected given the complexity and punitive nature of the current system (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019) and the W&I toxic culture which is influenced by the neoliberal ideological tenet of individual responsibility/fault within the welfare benefit system (Baker & Davis, 2017; Bennett, 2012; Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2010; Whitworth, 2021). This justifies a punitive welfare benefit system. Examples of not accessing welfare benefit entitlements include John's experiences. He has previously worked with Māori whānau with severely disabled children without knowledge of the child disability allowance where the children's disabilities would have meant that their parent(s) or caregiver(s) would have been highly likely to be eligible for the child

disability allowance. John, whilst discussing Scenario 4 describes a situation where he tried to support a grandmother apply for the unsupported child benefit:

> So, the both parents were drug addicts, and they're on 'P'. OT (Oranga Tamariki) had lifted the kids and put them with the grandmother, two kids, the grandmother, and the grandfather. So, when I went round to do a wellness check on the xx-year-old boy that I was working with. The house was freezing cold. It didn't even have the basic insulation, it was, […] pretty much a wool shed converted into some kind of house. There were towels as curtains and stuff. So, it was just really abject poverty. So, I went to WINZ and I said this is, this is this situation. I'm a social worker. And they said sorry we can't do anything without OT. So, I went to OT and they said really no, we've put the care to the parents, that's WINZ, all she has to do is, get this, this kuia, this older, older grandma to come into WINZ and they'll set her up. So, she goes into WINZ, she's, […] 65-plus, she goes into WINZ. They're incredibly rude to her, they're incredibly harsh to her. She's already embarrassed at the fact she's always, her and her husband have always looked after themselves. That was a big thing for her to get support. I had to talk her into going down that road. So, she was, you know, we could say whakamā, she was very whakamā about it. She walked in, and that process there to, for her to even walk in took two weeks. She walked in; they were rude to her. The person that was supposed to see her wasn't there. The other person acted like they didn't even know what she was talking about, sent her away with other things, that was that. About six weeks later I went to check on the wellness check on the, on the boy that I had in my care and exact same situation. And I said why didn't you? And she said, I couldn't, I couldn't after that, go back. I'd rather just live like this.

This powerful example is included firstly because it provides a very clear example of the W&I toxic culture leading to difficulties accessing welfare benefit entitlements, particularly for Māori women who are likely to experience institutional racism (Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019). Furthermore, it illustrates the negative impacts upon families and children where the actions of W&I coincide with ineffective individual welfare benefit advocacy. Difficulties accessing welfare benefit payments include a lack of knowledge, on the part of the person applying for a particular benefit payment, about the application process and the eligibility criteria. In this instance W&I will require proof of the children's parents' inability to care for them. Applying for the UCB is not simply a matter of going into a W&I office as John has described. Other difficulties are the unhelpful and "rude" way W&I staff interact with people and the loss of personal dignity experienced by the person thereby increasing a reluctance to make further applications for welfare benefit payments. It also illustrates the need for advocacy support during interactions with W&I.

It also alludes to the practice of Oranga Tamariki (OT) social workers where the housing and financial circumstances, including possible eligibility for benefit entitlements, of the adults caring for the children are not addressed. The lack of an advocacy approach by OT social workers that John describes is consistent with observations made of the impacts of neoliberalism where, "Some social workers have noted a change in managerial attitude towards advocacy from an accepted part of practice to something which will mark the social worker as 'radical' or 'odd'" (Darroch, 2017, p. 35). The perception of being unusual for doing individual advocacy work can be perpetuated by a social work education that does not address the issue. The logical consequence of this is that welfare benefit advocacy work is likely to be not done or done ineffectively and whānau do not access their welfare benefit entitlements. Theme 2 will discuss additions to social work course content that may address this.

5.3 Theme 2 What should be taught

All eight participants expressed their support for the inclusion of individual welfare benefit advocacy in social work education. Carol stated, "Oh, definitely need it. I think, yeah, practical advocating skills, role playing, or scenario grouping. Or, yeah, there's definitely room to improve our skills, rather than waiting until we're out in the field to develop our skills." Helen, confirmed this need, stating, "Yes, definitely yes", and added,

> If I had known this prior to going into the field I wouldn't have struggled with helping the –
> I just learnt as I was doing the mahi, you know. So, I was learning as I was learning with my
> own patients on like, shit, this is, you know big. We need to be doing this now.

They are describing a need for individual welfare benefit advocacy skills to support people experiencing poverty and experiencing difficulties accessing entitlements from W&I and that welfare benefit advocacy is a significant part of their social work practice. They both indicate it was necessary to learn some advocacy skills once employed as a social worker and it was possible to do so. However, the findings from the above scenario analysis indicates the existence of significant gaps in the participants' knowledge and the decreased likelihood of people accessing their full welfare benefit entitlements. A 'learn on the job' approach seems to be unreliable.

The availability or presence of a social worker to advocate for a person to access a benefit payment does not impact upon the legal entitlement for that payment. The legal entitlement exists based upon the person's circumstances (Stephens, 2019). The need for advocacy support is indicative of the presence of other issues cumulatively described as a toxic culture. All participants either provided examples of the support they had given or explicitly stated that people applying for benefits needed their support. Kevin provided an example of the support he gives to older adults and refers to people not knowing what their entitlements are,

It could be something very simple, like getting a St John's alarm [this is an alarm that is worn like a pendant around your neck and is used to summon help in an emergency], funded by Work and Income as part of the disability allowance, specific medical alarm document, not a hard thing to arrange, not a hard thing to do. People don't know they are entitled to that.

Helen expresses her frustration when people phone her after being denied support by W&I.

And then all it took was for me to go in the very next day with them and they got everything they asked for and more and I always say that the case manager, why the hell did it take for me to come in, like why don't you just do this yesterday?

Margaret comments, "you often get a complete different outcome, if you're, if you're going in and advocating for somebody, with somebody."

Helen and Margaret's experiences are corroborated by Darroch (2017) when describing the experiences of participants in his research,

Often advocacy involved helping clients to navigate systems which were unfamiliar and unfriendly to clients. Some of this advocacy was described as part of normal social work practice, but several examples included going beyond what the social worker would normally do for a client: 'But what I'm finding more and more is because of WINZ changes, is my clients ring me up and go 'went to Work and Income XXX and I went into this and they said I'm not allowed it' and I said 'Really?' And I said, 'let's make an appointment' and we go back in, they're definitely allowed it and they definitely get it. But I have to go with them to get what they want (p.62).

The participant in Darroch's research describes the same need for advocacy support stemming from W&I staff declining to approve welfare benefit applications made by people without support

as do the participants of this research. Of further significance is that Darroch does not consider individual welfare benefit advocacy to be normal social work practice further supporting the view that this is not real social work. Furthermore, he includes W&I as a system that is both unfamiliar and unfriendly to people needing to make welfare benefit applications. This is consistent with the presence of a toxic culture within W&I and in my view supports a need to include individual welfare benefit advocacy in social work education.

Anna differentiates between knowledge and voice, giving as an example of knowledge,

> Well, like for example, myself, you know, and it did not, you – you're not told about entitlements, or what you are entitled to with Work and Income. So, how do you know if you don't know? So, that knowledge, yeah.

She contrasts this lack of knowledge with an emphasis on voice within her course, "there were papers that empowered voice. But identifying programmes or papers that give you knowledge, no." Regarding voice she describes "a journey of discovery" where,

> It was beautiful to see the shyer ones come through that had no voice. And like towards the end of year one finally find a voice and having the strength to use it, to stand proud and you know, just to speak to their truth and being able to do that.

She then links this lack of voice experienced by students to families that "don't have the strength to face agencies such as Kainga Ora or Work and Income" and their consequent need for individual advocacy support. Anna returns to the lack of course content around knowledge of benefit entitlements and the need to connect knowledge and voice:

> it definitely comes back to, to knowledge, you know, when you don't know something as well as you should or do, then you're not going to speak to it with a lot of mana or with a voice. You become a – shy away from stuff you don't know.

Anna is describing an emphasis on the development of student self-confidence and self-esteem. However, the use of self-confidence and self-esteem is limited if these qualities are not combined with a similar emphasis on individual welfare benefit advocacy. Whilst having self-esteem and confidence are important it is important to build upon these to enhance social work practice. An emphasis on social work students' personal development runs the risk of perpetuating what Chereni (2016) describes as the prioritisation of psychotherapy and other individualised interventions in preference to addressing structural causes of poverty. This is consistent with the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility/fault and negation of social causes of poverty. Once qualified and employed as social workers, the students are unlikely to do individual welfare benefit advocacy work because they lack knowledge of it.

Other participants also identify a need for course content regarding practical individual welfare benefit advocacy skills. The participants who had attended Unitec whilst there was an Advocacy paper provided express a similar view. Margaret wants more on "how to work with WINZ. How to get people what they need is, is crucial. It's basic survival stuff [...] Just more how to, how to get things sorted." She also says, "It would be good if they just had a bit more of the practical." Continuing with the need for practical skills Carol comments,

> I think more practical skills around how to. So, like our Child Protection Risk Assessment was very factual. We had a case study. We had to write down how we would do the Report of Concern. We had to do it very actively, do, where I think it should be the same for the advocacy, with, with, housing or with WINZ or with, you know, whatever. That has to be practical [...] Or what's gonna get them, yeah, more, more benefits.

John states, "Definitely with WINZ more, more practical kind of, I don't know, more, more, more stuff that you use on a daily basis."

The lack of connection between the theory taught and practical advocacy skills has been addressed in Theme 1 and is further emphasised by Margaret who states, "what we were given was pretty good. But specific stuff that we do on a day-to-day basis, a lot of it wasn't even touched on" and by Carol:

> There's no connection on the challenges on how to use that theory to challenge, so you can use the words 'human rights' in your letters, you can say this is the human right issue. You know, by the standard of this she has the requirements to live like this. But the reality is that the caseworker just wants to say 'no'.

Her experience is that theory taught within her course is not helpful when confronted with the W&I toxic culture that leads to declining lawful welfare benefit applications.

The inclusion of realistic welfare benefit advocacy scenarios similar to those used in this research was identified as a possible way to provide a realistic context within which to link theory and individual welfare benefit advocacy skills. Carol states,

> I think that having those scenarios, or scenarios similarities of that and we worked in a group and had to facilitate it more. More practical knowledge and understanding of Work and Income would be awesome because it's a beast. And it's a big one.

She is identifying the difficulties people experience accessing welfare benefit entitlements as having a significant adverse effect upon people's lives and also identifies the need for "more practical knowledge" along with an "understanding" or analysis of the welfare benefit system. This need for analysis leads us back to a theoretical basis, for example neoliberalism and neoliberal welfare reform.

Further supporting use of realistic scenarios, Anna states,

I'd definitely like to see some lived experience scenarios that have been, had positive and

negative outcomes, whatever they are. Because there are some that we don't really talk

about the scenarios that you've given, the examples, there's none of that.

Without any other course content portraying the realities of individual welfare benefit advocacy

Sally found the research scenarios to be a useful introduction.

It was good to actually see the scenarios because I know that's something that I will be,

you know, dealing with if I do want to become a SWIS (Social Worker in Schools) in the

future. And these are actually the kind of real-life scenarios, so, it was actually a good eye-

opener.

Use of realistic scenarios also facilitated revelations of experiences within the participants'

whānau or their own personal experiences. Whilst discussing Scenario 4 that focused on a

grandparent's eligibility for unsupported child benefit because she was caring for her

grandchildren, Sally talks about being in her grandparents' care, "they were able to get money to,

you know, to help and support me with my schooling as well." Also, when discussing Scenario 4

Anna acknowledges having heard about unsupported child benefit:

I have heard of that and that's only because my parents received that for my whangai

brother. So that's what they received for him. Again, I'm not too sure about the nuts and

bolts of, you know, the entitlements or the obligations of what that looks like. It's

definitely something that I'd like to know more about.

Anna appears to be linking her personal experience to a desire for further knowledge. John, in

response to the question, how easy or difficult was it for you to respond to these scenarios?,

stated it was a "Bit difficult." He clarifies this:

> I was out of home when I was about 14. I was on the independent youth benefit. That's
>
> what it was called back then. I had nowhere to stay and if, so – I grew up within the
>
> system. So, so all that comes into my, you know, all those experiences as a, are brought
>
> with me. And yes, hard, you know.

John goes on to state, "for me it was institutional racism, I think, that led me to social work. Like, I grew up in, in abject poverty". Mark, when discussing Scenario 3 that included a whānau with a disabled child acknowledged he also had a disability. Later during the interview, consistent with a toxic culture within W&I, he described his experience of interactions with W&I whilst receiving either jobseeker support or supported living payment, "I've been involved with Work and Income. It's been very stressful, and you don't know where to turn. And there's a lot of red tape. And it's very difficult for families."

He adds "Jobseeker, during which I personally felt dehumanised" and,

> When I was a lot more unwell and I was actually receiving supported living. That was
>
> slightly less dehumanising because I wasn't being interrogated at least once a week about
>
> my job seeking progress. So, my personal experience isn't that pleasant. And actually, one
>
> of the reasons I'd like to help people with that.

The participants express a strong personal connection to the situations portrayed in the research scenarios.

5.3.1 Need for a child welfare focus

The research scenarios all contained reference to adults with children in their care. This is consistent with a focus within social work on the welfare of children.

The above literature review identified a focus, both internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand, within the social work profession on child welfare and the connections to issues of poverty

(Bywaters, 2020; Bywaters et al., 2018; Hyslop, 2016b; Hyslop & Keddell, 2018; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009; Morris et al., 2018; Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020; Saar-Heiman et al., 2017). Poverty is seen as being an ever present but ignored issue (Bywaters, 2020). A Poverty Aware Paradigm (PAP) has been posited which emphasises interconnectedness between theory and practice along with a relationship of solidarity between social workers and the people they support. This includes the provision of support to access housing and income (Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009; Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020; Saar-Heiman et al., 2017). Furthermore, PAP explicitly links the necessity to understand the exacerbation of poverty caused by the hegemonic influence of neoliberal ideology along with a managerial focus on outcomes and the consequent "individualisation of social problems and the othering of poor people" (Krumer-Nevo, 2016, p. 1805). Krumer-Nevo (2016) maintains that with such an analysis it is possible for social workers to take a conscious position of solidarity with people experiencing poverty where they are actively involved in those people's day-to-day struggles. Saar-Heiman & Gupta (2020) have adapted the PAP developed by Krumer-Nevo to address issues within child protection social work.

From the data there appears to be a focus on child welfare/child protection within social work education. Kevin commented the University of Auckland social work lecturers would "always be talking around Oranga Tamariki". Both Helen and Carol mentioned their Unitec course provided a Child Protection paper. Anna observed at the Manukau Institute of Technology her course "never really went down the path we're talking about – policies, procedures of Work and Income or any government agency other than Oranga Tamariki." However, Mark who also attended MIT stated, "the Child, Youth and Act […] we went through one day just in passing" but the prevailing view of the participants is their education focused on child welfare issues and its relevant legislation whilst not having a similar focus on welfare benefit issues and the Social Security Act. Examples of the relevance of individual welfare benefit advocacy to child welfare have been included in the participant's responses to the above scenarios where John tells of a grandmother who did not

access unsupported child benefit whilst caring for two of her grandchildren and Carol tells of a woman who was declined sole parent support whilst her partner was unable to return from Samoa. There appears to be an opportunity to include individual welfare benefit advocacy into Aotearoa New Zealand's social work education where it is consistent with an existing focus on the welfare of children. This requires consideration of an advocacy process.

5.3.2 Need for an advocacy process

Margaret did a placement at Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP) and explained key parts of an advocacy process used at AAAP when supporting people to claim welfare benefit entitlements,

> Well, I think people have a right to dignity. The way we worked, we used the Social
>
> Security Act to underpin what we were advocating for, for the whānau that were coming
>
> in asking for support. I think when, you know, when, especially when, we'd get a decline
>
> or, or something like that was with WINZ. Then we had a process to follow to, and using,
>
> using the Social Security Act to, to pretty much, you know, fight for people's rights.

She clarifies this process,

> I guess, doing face-to-face with, with case managers advocating for people's basic sort of
>
> needs. If, if they, you know, if they decline something and it was felt, it was often
>
> unjustified or unfair. Then, then, I probably use the Social Security Act, you know, […] that
>
> it's there to provide people with enough to sort of be part of society and to, and, you
>
> know, and to give people dignity and stuff like that. And, and they, there is a lot of
>
> discretion within that for them, to, to, to grant something even if […] their policy and
>
> procedure is to not grant something. So, you can, you can push that argument […], using
>
> the Social Security Act.

She adds, "If that didn't work and then you went to, […] – I'd go to a manager and […] push for that. If that didn't work do a review of decision." She further clarifies that a review of decision would "go to the Benefit Review Committee to be looked at by a supposedly independent body where they'd make a decision."

In the above, Margaret identifies the importance of an alignment with the people seeking welfare benefit advocacy support, knowledge of the Social Security Act, particularly knowledge of discretionary powers to enable challenges to W&I decisions based on the Social Security Act, going from a case manager to their office manager and if necessary, lodging a review of decision. Then going to a benefit review committee (BRC). She also alludes to the composition of a BRC that "comprises two officers of the MSD and a community representative" (Stephens, 2019, p. 392) and its consequent lack of independence.

Mark provides further details of an advocacy process beginning with the importance of doing background work to clarify possible welfare benefit entitlements using a Ministry of Social Development webpage, 'Check what you might get' (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.-b). He would also gather "evidence" to support a person's eligibility, and,

> Go in, sit with them, possibly having those resources highlighted so I can point out my evidence. Not a lot you can do when the evidence is staring you in the face. It's the same way I tend to work with ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation). Just have the evidence before you even get in touch and politely highlight it. First 'no', evidence, second 'no', more evidence. Third, back to legislation or back to the 'you do have discretionary powers' speech if needed.

Anna identifies the importance of talking with people "to understand the predicament they're in" prior to contacting W&I. When discussing food grant eligibility she emphasises, "we have to

remember too that your house shopping doesn't just entail food. You still got to wipe bums, and clean dishes, and wash your hair. And all of that and change nappies."

Carol identifies a fundamental purpose of individual welfare benefit advocacy of changing W&I decisions from 'no' to 'yes'. Anna summarises this, stating, "And 'no' is the wrong answer.", with the clear implication of a solidarity with the people seeking this advocacy support.

In furtherance of solidarity, commenting on an educative role Margaret states,

> Part of the journey is, is, is educating people about, you know, often it's not their fault, they're in that situation and, and you know, and it's unfair. And you know, and a lot of my work is about, is about challenging that with people. And, and you know, allowing them to have some hope that, that things can be better to some extent.

Each semi-structured interview began with four individual welfare benefit scenarios. The scenarios detail instances of need for individual welfare benefit advocacy. It is therefore predictable that the participants' responses will focus on advocacy in response to those needs. In response to these scenarios and subsequent questions the participants cumulatively describe a multi-faceted individual welfare benefit advocacy process. Their description does not explicitly include a relationship between this individual advocacy and collective advocacy whose focus is social change/justice. A more comprehensive welfare benefit advocacy process would include explicit links between individual and collective advocacy (Russell & Bradford, 2022).

As previously discussed in the literature review there is a dearth of academic social work literature which addresses these matters. The only relevant literature I am aware of is a welfare advocacy handbook co-written by Dr Sue Bradford and myself, we maintain, "Collective and individual advocacy are totally interconnected when undertaken from a position of commitment to social justice, solidarity and structural change" (Russell & Bradford, 2022, p. 12). The complexity and

need for the inclusion of a detailed approach to a comprehensive welfare advocacy process should

not be underestimated.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

There are two parts of the research question – how well does social work education prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits and what could be done better? The data from the research participants, who are all qualified social workers, shows that the first part of the research question can be simply answered, social work education has not adequately prepared these social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefits. Data from the participants indicate that welfare benefit advocacy, as either individual or collective advocacy is either not taught or not taught in sufficient detail. This suggests social workers are unprepared to competently support people living in poverty and needing to claim welfare benefits. These people experience injustices arising from neoliberal welfare reform. They experience significant difficulty in accessing their full legal welfare benefit entitlements. Furthermore, they experience a dehumanising toxic culture within W&I when they do apply for welfare benefit entitlements. Social workers are unlikely to be able to challenge this culture when doing individual welfare benefit advocacy or to effectively support people to access all of their benefit entitlements. Also, they are unlikely to advocate for systemic changes to the Social Security Act 2018 or the policies and practices of MSD and W&I through more comprehensive welfare benefit advocacy. Professional social work's commitment to social justice infers this is a valid area of social work practice.

The second part of the research question asks, 'what could be done better?' I start from the premise that what social workers are taught influences what they do, it influences their practice. It is instructive to again consider the global definition of social work which is also the definition used by the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers.

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social
>
> change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of

people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for

diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social

sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and

structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (Aotearoa New Zealand

Association of Social Workers, n.d., para. 1).

Within social work academic literature there are numerous examples of recommendations for

social work and social work education to challenge neoliberal orthodoxy (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016;

Darroch, 2017; Fenton, 2021; Hyslop, 2016a, 2016b; Hyslop & Keddell, 2018; Krumer-Nevo, 2016;

Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009; Morley et al., 2019; Morley et al., 2017; Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020;

Saar-Heiman et al., 2017). Welfare benefit advocacy provides an opportunity to challenge

neoliberalism's influence upon the welfare benefit system. Fenton (2021) recommends social work

education should provide an understanding of "how neoliberalism working as intended creates

poverty, inequality and hardship" (p. 11). Precisely how this understanding is provided is unclear.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Beddoe and Keddell (2016), social work academics and educators,

describe a course content intended to develop an "informed outrage" about the effects of poverty

but it is unclear how this is translated into social work practice. The research data indicates that

the participants do not see clear links between social work theory and individual welfare benefit

advocacy. The above definition of social work suggests that practice and theory should be

interlinked within a purpose of fighting injustice. A Poverty Aware Paradigm has the capacity to

further clarify and solidify relationships between theory and practice.

The paradigm aims to integrate three interrelated facets – ontology, epistemology and

axiology – and to examine the bidirectional influence between theory, ethics and practice.

In ontological terms, the paradigm's answer to questions such as 'What is the nature of

poverty? and 'What are the characteristics of poor people? Is that poverty is a violation of

human rights and that people in poverty 'fight' and 'resist' it on a daily basis. In epistemological terms the PAP's answer to the question 'What kind of knowledge is needed when working with people in poverty? is that professional knowledge is a critical-constructivist process based on an ongoing dialogue and 'close relationships' between social workers and service users. In axiological terms the paradigm's answer to the question 'Where should a social worker position herself ethically when working with people in poverty? is that PAP entails social workers 'standing by' people in poverty representing their knowledge and advocating for their interests in society (Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020, p. 1171).

Welfare benefit advocacy including both individual and collective advocacy is consistent with both the above global definition of social work and the conscious acts of solidarity between social workers and the people needing their support alluded to by Saar-Heiman and Gupta (2020). Effective welfare benefit advocacy is academically complex and should explicitly link theory and practice. The development of a positioning of solidarity requires an understanding of philosophical issues as identified by Saar-Heiman & Gupta (2020) above. It also requires an understanding of the history of Aotearoa New Zealand's welfare benefit system and contextualising this within numerous social constructs including breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, colonisation, mono-culturalism and institutional racism. Additionally, an analysis of neoliberal capitalism is required to understand its impacts upon the exacerbation of poverty, social work, and the welfare benefit system. From that positioning knowledge of specific welfare benefit entitlements is needed. Welfare benefit advocacy appears to be a neglected area of social work practice. However, it does provide an opportunity to link theoretical aspects of social work to the reality of social work practice and implement an active, practical resistance to the consequences of neoliberalism.

Realistic scenarios have the potential to form the basis of social work welfare benefit advocacy education. The scenarios may also prompt discussion of a range of personal experiences that can be linked to the experiences of the people social workers support and to wider social issues, for example institutional racism. Furthermore, a sharing of identified common experiences between social work students may promote solidarity and lessen the othering which occurs within the current social work professional/client dichotomy. These realistic scenarios could also facilitate the identification of a welfare benefit advocacy process. A welfare benefit advocacy process should include a collective advocacy which has the purpose of furthering goals of social change and social justice whilst addressing the immediate needs of individuals and their families. This is consistent with the above definition of social work (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, n.d.), an informed outrage (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016) and the Poverty Aware Paradigm (Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Krumer-Nevo et al., 2009; Saar-Heiman & Gupta, 2020; Saar-Heiman et al., 2017).

6.1 Limitations

There are eighteen tertiary education institutions providing social work education courses recognised by the New Zealand Social Work Registration Board five of which are in Auckland (Social Work Registration Board, n.d.-b). Research participants attended three of the Auckland courses. It is possible that other courses prepare social workers to work with people claiming welfare benefit payments differently from that analysed in this research. Furthermore, only one participant had attended the University of Auckland social work course, three had attended the Manukau Institute of Technology course and four had attended the Unitec course. However, an over emphasis on numbers detracts from the validity of explicitly subjective qualitative research with an implicit prioritisation of more traditional, quantitative and supposedly objective research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry et al., 2017). These limited numbers are counter-balanced by the similarity of the participants' descriptions of their course's content and

statements as to the importance of inclusion of individual welfare benefit advocacy into social work education.

Four of the eight participants had attended Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP) welfare benefit advocacy training that I had facilitated and were consequently aware of my positioning regarding welfare benefit advocacy. It can be argued that they knew what I wanted to hear. Also, the Information Sheet (Appendix D) refers to my previous involvement with AAAP and the other participants are also likely to have had some preconceptions about my positioning. It is possible that the research participants do not reflect a majority view of social workers as to the relevance of welfare benefit advocacy.

I have explicitly declared my positioning and this positioning has undoubtedly influenced and informed choices made as to what literature has been referenced and quoted. Similarly, the emphasis placed on and use of particular statements made by the participants was influenced by my positioning. Dependent upon the perspective of the reader this may be viewed as either a strength or limitation of this research.

This exploratory research has been done by a novice researcher without other literature directly addressing the research question. It is potentially a starting point for further research. The research data focuses mainly on the need to include individual welfare benefit advocacy

An example of what I contend to be a strength of the research is the welfare benefit advocacy scenarios used that were constructed from my knowledge of welfare benefit advocacy. The credibility of these scenarios is enhanced by the participants who acknowledge they were realistic. Kevin described these scenarios as being "similar" to his experiences. Helen, in reference to Scenario 4 stated, "Just recently we had a case like this." In reference to Scenario 2 Mark stated,

"I've seen that in my friend's circles. That's very common". Providing an overall observation Sally stated,

> It was good to actually see the scenarios because I know that's something that I will be, you know, dealing with if I do want to be a SWIS (social worker in schools) in the future and these are actually the kind of real-life scenarios, so it was actually a good eye-opener.

Furthermore, the scenarios elicited from the participants references to a variety of their personal experiences. These personalised responses indicate the participants perceived the scenarios as accurate depictions of their reality.

6.2 Further research

Given the current lack of social work academic attention to welfare benefit advocacy there is an extensive scope to possible future research. There are many possibilities and there will be possibilities that I have not thought of therefore those I have identified are likely to be far from an exhaustive list.

Further qualitative research involving educators from the social work courses at the University of Auckland, Manukau Institute of Technology and Unitec may further clarify the course content described by the participants of this research. The educators could also be asked about their views of the relevance of welfare benefit advocacy to the social work profession. This could be done in conjunction with an analysis of documented course content. This research could be limited to the three Auckland-based courses referred to in this research project or extend to up to all eighteen social work courses in Aotearoa New Zealand. Furthermore, the Social Work Registration Board (SWRB) has regulatory powers over the content of social work education courses (Beddoe, 2018). It would therefore be relevant to interview staff from the SWRB as to their opinion of the

relevance and/or necessity to include welfare benefit advocacy in social work education. This could become a major doctoral research project and deliver relevant national data.

Obtaining the views of people who are social work 'clients' would be consistent with the global definition of social work. Researching their perspectives of their interactions with social workers around their financial needs and interactions with W&I would be relevant. This could be combined with a full review of each of the research participant's current welfare benefit payments and if a need is identified the research could include active individual welfare benefit advocacy to ensure they are receiving all payments they are entitled to. This possible research may also provide information about the impacts of social work practice where individual welfare benefit advocacy is not a priority.

Other research options include research of current social work students as to the content of their social work courses and their perceptions of the relevance of welfare benefit advocacy. It would also be useful to conduct research consulting a range of social work employers as to their views of the need for social workers to be able to do welfare benefit advocacy.

On the assumption that that there are no social work courses in Aotearoa New Zealand that provides a welfare benefit advocacy paper it would be of interest to observe the process of developing such a paper. This could include the process of identifying a social work course willing to engage in this. Once developed and being taught, an evaluation of the effectiveness of such a paper could be done.

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Appendices

Appendix A. AUT Ethics Committee approval letter

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

27 January 2021

Charon Lessing
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Charon

Re Ethics Application: **20/407 Social work education – how well does it address issues related to benefit advocacy**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 27 January 2024.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. In the discomforts and risks section of the Information Sheet please replace 'you will retain complete anonymity' with 'your identity and information will remain confidential'

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: alastair@mefsc.org.nz; Kay Hammond

Appendix B. **Semi-structured interview guide**

Semi-structured interview guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. This interview will begin with 4 benefit advocacy scenarios. I will read each scenario to you and am happy to repeat this for you. I will take notes whilst you respond to each scenario.

The interview will be recorded and later transcribed.

At the end of your responses I will ask some follow-up questions.

Scenarios

1 A sole parent with 4 children is about to move into Kainga Ora (Housing NZ) housing. She identifies a need for a $450 food grant. Work and Income has approved a $200 food grant because the sole parent has had 3 previous food grants in the past 5 months totalling $350.

As the family's social worker what actions would you take?

2 You visit a family (2 parents and 5 children) at their 3 bedroom home. The parents and the children are sleeping on mattresses on the floor. You are told they are in rent arrears totalling $4000 and have been given notice to attend a Tenancy Tribunal hearing. The weekly rent is $680. You are also shown a letter from Work and Income stating the family owe Work and Income at the rate of $50 per week. The parents have no paid work and receive jobseeker support, accommodation supplement, winter energy payment and family tax credit.

As the family's social worker what actions would you take?

3 A family (2 parents and 3 children) have been referred to you. One of the children who is 6 years old has severe autism. The mother works full-time earning $1200 per week before tax. She has had the wage for 3 years. They have been in their current house for the past 2 years and pay weekly rent of $700. When they first moved into this house they got a food grant from Work and Income and have received several other food grants from Work and Income since then. They receive no on-going payments from Work and Income.

As the family's social worker what actions would you take?

4 A grandmother contacts you because she is in rent arrears with Kainga Ora. She tells you that she is struggling with bills because she has 2 grandchildren to care for. These grandchildren have been in her care for the past year, the children's parents live overseas and both have on-going drug abuse problems. She went to Work and Income when the grandchildren came into her care and was told to go to Inland Revenue to get financial help. When she talked with someone from Inland Revenue she was told to go back to Work and Income. She didn't understand what she had to do and gave up trying to get any financial help for the care of her grandchildren.

As the family's social worker what actions would you take?

Follow-up questions

1 How easy or difficult was it for you to respond to these scenarios? (Follow-up question – why do you think this was easy or difficult for you?)

2 How did your social work degree course influence your responses?

3 In general, what individual advocacy skills were taught with your degree? (Follow-up question – can you identify particular papers that covered these skills?)

4 What benefit advocacy skills were taught?

5 What pieces of legislation were covered within your degree course?

6 Within the context of the existence of poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand, what wider social context was provided to help you understand why poverty exists? (Follow-up question – can you identify particular papers which covered this wider social context?)

7 What is your experience of how the welfare system treats people claiming benefit entitlements?

8 Can you comment on if you think it is important for your social work practice and for the people you support to know about benefit entitlements?

9 Thinking back to your social work course and using the social work practice experience you now have what, if any, changes would you recommend to your social work course?

10 Is there anything else would like to add?

Thank you for your time and input into this research.

Appendix C. **Research advert**

PARTICIPANTS WANTED

Can you help?

Are you a social worker who has qualified from an Auckland-based social work course in the last 3 years and are now working as a social worker in Auckland?

Then you could participate in a research project looking at how social work education prepares social workers to support people claiming benefit entitlements.

The research is being carried out by AUT Masters student, Alastair Russell.

Participants will be asked to take part in one interview lasting up to 90 minutes. This interview will include use of realistic benefit entitlement scenarios and follow-up questions.

Participants will have complete confidentiality.

Participation in this research is voluntary.

If you are interested and would like more information in order to make an informed decision please email Alastair Russell at alastair@mefsc.org.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 27 January 2021 AUTEC Reference number 20/407

Appendix D. **Information sheet**

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

04/02/2021

Project Title

Social work education – how well does it address issues of benefit advocacy?

An Invitation

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. My name is Alastair Russell. I currently work at Mangere East Family Services where I am the social work practise leader and I have previously worked as the advocacy coordinator at Auckland Action Against Poverty. I am asking you to participate in research into the question – how well does social work education prepare social workers to work with welfare claimants and what could be done better?

If you agree to participate in this research I will ask you to participate in a recorded interview which will last up to 90 minutes. I will use prepared benefit scenarios and follow up questions as a basis for a conversation with you.

The interview can happen at a time and place convenient to you. I am happy to come to your office or we can decide upon another venue.

This research is part of a Master of Philosophy qualification I am working towards.

What is the purpose of this research?

I hope this research can begin to identify what is taught in tertiary social work courses about welfare benefit issues and how social workers use the knowledge gained to work with welfare claimants. It is possible that improvements may be identified.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have responded to an advertisement and indicated an interest in participating in this research.

Exclusion criteria

You will not be able to participate in this research if you are an employee of Mangere East Family Services or have a close personal connection to me.

Also you will not be able to participate in the research if you have not qualified within the past 3 years from an Auckland based social work course and are not currently working as a social worker in Auckland.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you choose to withdraw from the study please send me an email to let me know.

You will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

If you are interested in participating in this research please send an email to my work address, alastair@mefsc.org.nz and I will send you a Consent Form.

What will happen in this research?

You will take part in a recorded interview lasting up to 90 minutes. The interview will be transcribed, and all data will be securely stored either in a locked cupboard or on a password protected computer. Towards the end of the research if any direct quotes from you will be used, I will email you to verify these quotes are accurate.

The data gained will only be used for the purposes of writing a thesis, or journal article, or presentation at a conference and for use in social media. In any of these you will not be named, and a pseudonym will be used.

Appendix E. **Consent form**

Consent Form

Project title: **Social work education – how well does it address issues related to benefit advocacy**

Project Supervisor: **Dr Charon Lessing**

Researcher: **Alastair Russell**

O   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 04/02/2021.

O   I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

O   I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

O   I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

O   I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

O   I agree to take part in this research.

O   I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): YesO   NoO

Participant's signature: ……………………………………………………………………………………………

Participant's name: ……………………………………………………………………………………………

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 27 January 2021 AUTEC Reference number 20/407.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.