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The construction of wellbeing for solo mothers: An exploration of the relationship between work, welfare, social justice and wellbeing for solo mothers

Kathryn M. Russell
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CONSTRUCTION OF WELLBEING FOR SOLO MOTHERS

The Construction of Wellbeing for Solo Mothers: An Exploration of the
Relationship between Work, Welfare, Social Justice and Wellbeing for Solo Mothers.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of Doctor of Psychology (Community)

Date of submission:

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Statement of Confidentiality

Ethical clearance from the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee was granted in May 2005. The confidentiality and privacy of the participants were protected at all times, including in all correspondence between myself, research supervisors and other colleagues. Pseudonyms for the participants and their family members are used throughout the thesis. All raw data included in the thesis (i.e. verbatim quotes) were scrutinised for information that could identify the participant.

Abstract

Using a sequential transformative mixed methods approach prioritising qualitative data, the construction of subjective wellbeing of Australian solo mothers was explored in relation to work, welfare and social justice. A purposive sample of 73 solo mothers was recruited for the quantitative part of the study and 15 solo mothers were selected from the sample to interview for the qualitative component. The study was undertaken on a background of welfare reform announced in the Federal Budget for 2005-2006 with changes taking effect from July 1, 2006 affecting many solo mothers with young children. Initial analyses of data obtained through the Personal Wellbeing Index confirmed the hypothesis that the solo mothers in the current study have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing compared to the general population of Australia $t(72) = -10.28, p < 0.01$. Multiple Analysis of Variance identified the variable of “income” to have a significant effect on the four domains of “standard of living” ($F(2,35) = 3.61, p < 0.05$), “achievements in life” ($F(2,35) = 3.67$), “sense of safety” ($F(2,35) = 3.44, p < 0.05$), and “future security” ($F(2,35) = 3.97, p < 0.05$). Multiple regression analysis also identified income as a significant predictor of subjective wellbeing $t = 2.42, p < 0.05$. There was no statistically significant difference in subjective wellbeing between solo mothers who worked and those who did not work despite inferences made by other researchers that work has a positive effect on levels of subjective wellbeing.

The qualitative part of the current study utilised social constructionism from a feminist theoretical perspective and form of enquiry to explore in depth, the ways in which meanings are attached to experiences and events thus impacting subjective wellbeing. The findings are discussed in light of knowledge presented in the literature review. Similar to results in the quantitative part of the study, qualitative findings

revealed income to be a very important factor in the level of happiness, wellbeing and ability to cope as a solo mother. The solo mothers also reported role conflict that was exacerbated by lack of supportive relationships and perceived stereotyping. Perceived lack of consultation by the Federal Government; perceived lack of empathy by politicians; and a sense of powerlessness to influence government decisions, all detracted from the solo mothers' sense of wellbeing.

Limitations of the current study are outlined as are the implications and recommendations for future action by government and community sectors. Future research opportunities are also presented, including alternative research methods to monitor the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers over time.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
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Many thanks to the solo mothers who participated in this research project – your honesty and willingness to share your stories make this thesis an insightful journey into life as a solo mother. I would also like to thank the various organisations which assisted in the recruitment of participants for this project: The National Council for Single Mothers and their Children; PRISM; and various schools throughout Australia.

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List of Acronyms

ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Services
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DSP	Disability Support Pension
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
NCSMC	National Council for Single Mothers and their Children
NSA	Newstart Allowance
PES	Pensioner Education Supplement
PPS	Parenting Payment Single
PWI	Personal Wellbeing Index
RGWR	Reference Group on Welfare Reform
SDB	Social Desirability Bias
SWB	Subjective Wellbeing

**The Construction of Wellbeing for Solo Mothers: An Exploration of the
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Mothers.**

Introduction.

The introduction to the current paper aims to provide a background to the prevalence of solo mother headed families in Australian society. Statistics provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics also serve to highlight the number of these families, which are reliant on welfare, such as Parenting Payment. The role of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform as precursor to recent reforms in the welfare system is explained. Reactions to the proposed welfare reforms announced in the 2005 Federal Budget were varied; however it was apparent that many agencies were concerned about the potential for further marginalisation of solo parents. Justification of the focus on selection of solo mothers as participants in the current study includes the likelihood of solo mothers being more prone to lack of skills and mental health issues impacting on their ability to engage in paid work. An outline of the subsequent chapters is provided emphasising the construction of female identity, wellbeing, different facets of work, history of the welfare system in Australia and the current welfare system as it relates to solo parents and issues surrounding social justice. The methodology used for the current study is also briefly described and an overview of the two part study is provided.

Solo mother headed families are one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged sub-groups in Australia and, overall, have one of the lowest standards of living (Butterworth, 2003; Loxton, Mooney, & Young, 2008; Papadakis, Fragoulis, & Phillips, 2008; Saunders, Hill, & Bradbury, 2008). Further, solo mothers are often reliant upon welfare payments for financial assistance (Walters, 2001) and have limited social support (Crosier, Butterworth, and Rogers 2007).

Solo mother is operationally defined in the current study as the mother of a child or children who is parenting without a partner and has the majority share of care and responsibility. Solo mothers include those who are widowed, have never married, are separated and/or mothers who are divorced. Solo mothers may or may not have financial support from the other parent and the child/children may or may not have contact with the other parent. The term solo parent will also be used throughout the current study when it is appropriate to include both solo mothers and fathers (e.g. welfare payments; legislation).

Aim of the Current Study

The aim of the current study is to explore the construction of wellbeing of solo mothers and the relationship that may exist between work, welfare, social justice and wellbeing for this particular group. As many solo mothers are dependent on welfare payments (Walters, 2001) the consequences of any changes made to conditions for income support are important to consider for development of future welfare initiatives. Further, solo mothers, as a group, often lack the means by which to influence legislation and it is vital to understand how wellbeing is constructed in a context of social change and welfare reform for this group. Understanding of wellbeing construction for solo mothers will enable the Federal Government and associated agencies to develop programs and establish practices aimed at empowering solo mothers, promoting social inclusion and resilience, thus increasing levels of wellbeing.

Overview of Concerns

Almost 14 percent of the total families in Australia and 20 percent of families with children were headed by solo parents (either solo mothers or solo fathers) in 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2010). The ABS census count in 2006 indicated that there were 823,254 solo parent families compared to 2,362,588 families with two parents (ABS, 2006). Solo mothers form the larger portion of the solo parent population, at approximately 86 percent (ABS, 2010). The percentage of solo mothers is expected to remain at this level. In 2008, there were approximately 459,500 solo parent families in Australia where the parent was not in the workforce, either because of unemployment or caring responsibilities. Of these, approximately 350,000 were solo mothers. In contrast, there were approximately 376,100 solo mothers (with children under the age of 15 years) who were in paid employment (ABS, 2009). The continuing upward trend of solo parent (particularly solo mother) headed households, greater reliance on welfare, and growing social exclusion of solo parents and other welfare dependent groups, prompted the Federal Government to commission a reference group in 1999 to provide advice on welfare reform (Reference Group on Welfare Reform [RGWR], 2000).

Over the course of nine months from 1999 to 2000, the reference group met with community groups, organisations, businesses and individuals. An interim report was submitted after four months, and a total of 360 submissions were made along with information obtained from internet feedback, focus groups with income support recipients, as well as representatives from the community, business, government and academic sectors (RGWR, 2000). Informed by recommendations made by the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, proposed changes to the welfare system were communicated during the Budget announcements in 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). Although a mere 15 per cent of unemployed people were required to seek work

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2005), McCallum (2005) noted the actual rate of unemployment had been at a 30 year low of approximately five per cent. Nevertheless, the Federal Government of Australia introduced reforms to the welfare system through the Welfare to Work reforms package in 2006. The Welfare to Work reforms were designed to assist and encourage people dependent on welfare to become more engaged in resuming or commencing paid work and mainly targeted people in receipt of Parenting Payment Single (PPS), Disability Support Pension (DSP), very long term unemployed and mature age people on income support (Andrews, 2005). Previously, solo parents receiving PPS did not have a participation requirement to work in order to receive assistance until the youngest child reached secondary school age. After July 2006 this changed to participation requirements when the youngest child reached primary school age (Daniels, 2009). Individuals who were receiving DSP were assessed as eligible for the pension if unable to engage in paid work more than 29 hours per week. However, after July 2006 this changed DSP eligibility if unable to work more than 14 hours per week. The reforms were met with some trepidation by welfare groups, particularly in regard to the impact upon solo parents and disabled people.

Concerns raised by agencies such as the National Council for Single Mothers and their Children [NCSMC], (2005), Australian Council of Social Services [ACOSS], (2005), and Brotherhood of St Laurence (Ziguras, 2005) were that vulnerable groups, including solo parents, might be disadvantaged by the changes in the welfare system, increasing stress levels of people who were likely to already be experiencing distress. The potential exacerbation of stressful circumstances as result of changes to the welfare system, raised questions of social justice and whether people such as solo mothers, who relied on welfare payments, would be further marginalised. For example, McCallum (2005) from ACOSS explained many income support recipients faced barriers such as lack of transport and communication (i.e. telephone) options. Nelms (2005),

representative of Brotherhood of St Laurence, also indicated solo parents were four times more likely than partnered parents on welfare to have multiple barriers including psychological, social and personal barriers. Similar findings have also been found internationally (Burstrom et al., 2010).

It is acknowledged that solo parents comprise both solo fathers and solo mothers, and both groups may be affected by welfare reforms. However, research suggests that solo mothers are more likely to be socially disadvantaged through lack of workforce skills, mental health problems, and physical limitations (Bernstein, 2001; Butterworth, 2003, Loxton, Mooney, & Young, 2006; Papadakis et al., 2008). Further, solo mothers are over-represented in the lower income brackets (Nelms, 2005). Such factors as these may impact on the level of satisfaction within several domains including standard of living, health, and financial security (i.e. wellbeing) for solo mothers. Moreover, the impact of the changes to the welfare system on the wellbeing of solo mothers may be significant, hence the focus of the current study.

Thesis Plan

The plan of the current thesis incorporates a review of the literature pertaining to the construction of wellbeing, work, welfare and social justice. This will be followed by a report of a mixed methods study of a group of solo mothers in relation to the construction of their wellbeing and the relationship between work, welfare, social justice and wellbeing.

The literature review comprises several chapters which provide comprehensive background for the ensuing study. Chapter one provides an understanding of the complexity of female identities and, in particular, identity as a solo mother. This chapter serves to elucidate the choices some women make in terms of motherhood and how such choices may affect wellbeing as a solo mother. The differences between roles and identities are discussed and the heterogeneity of solo mothers is highlighted. Within this

chapter, the reasons why some women choose to bear or not to bear children are discussed. Further, the factors involved in becoming a solo mother, as well societal perceptions of solo motherhood, and role conflict are also discussed. The information and discussion within this chapter will provide a background to the multifaceted identity many women possess, in particular, the identity of solo mother.

The definition of wellbeing is examined in chapter two and some methods of measurement of wellbeing are explained. Wellbeing can be measured either objectively or subjectively, however in the current study measurement of subjective wellbeing is considered to be most appropriate, as it relies on self report rather than observation. Subjective wellbeing is examined and homeostasis as well as set point theory are elucidated. Major influences of subjective wellbeing and issues as well as challenges commonly encountered by solo parents are also explored providing information of how wellbeing may be constructed, thus providing a basis to understand the influencing factors of solo mothers' wellbeing.

In chapter three, definitions of work are discussed, followed by a detailed assessment of different facets of work such as volunteering, parenting work, paid work as well as the multiple roles that are often undertaken. Determinants for women working in paid employment are examined, including preferences, supports and pressures. Particular challenges and barriers for solo mothers engaged in paid work, such as solo parenting, health concerns, supports, and skills are also examined, thus setting the scene for how such factors may influence the construction of wellbeing.

Chapter four provides an overview of the history of the welfare system as it relates to solo parents and the recognition of needs of solo parents. The current welfare regime is explained in light of what it means for a solo parent and how it may affect the construction of wellbeing. Distinctions between existing recipients of PPS and solo

mothers applying for welfare are also highlighted and explained, raising concerns regarding the fairness of the welfare system thus potentially affecting wellbeing.

A detailed examination of social justice theories follows in chapter five. This includes explanations of belief in a just world, distributive fairness, and procedural fairness. A discussion of social justice and fairness of the Welfare to Work reforms in relation to solo mothers and the construction of wellbeing follows and serves to formalise the rationale for the study. Hypotheses for the first part of the current study are also presented.

Chapter six establishes the methodology used for the current two part study. Within this chapter the research design is explained. The epistemology of social constructionism and its development are described followed by an explanation of the feminist theoretical perspective and methodology of feminist inquiry utilising mixed methods. The design of mixed methods used is also justified in light of the epistemology and methodology as being particularly suited to feminist inquiry.

Chapter seven comprises the first part of the current study. Part one contains the quantitative method using the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) (Cummins, Eckersley, Pallant, van Vugt, & Misajohn, 2003) as the main instrument. The quantitative component of the current study is the precursor to part two and establishes the hypothesised differences between solo mothers and the normative population as well as differences between solo mothers who are in paid employment and those who are totally reliant upon welfare payments. Results are also displayed of analyses using *t*-test, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) and regression analysis followed by a discussion of the results in relation to the hypotheses. The hypotheses relate to the lower levels of subjective wellbeing for solo mothers commonly detected in other studies and also test the supposition of the RGWR (2000) that solo mothers' wellbeing is raised by participation in the workforce.

Chapter eight is concerned with part two of the current study, which comprises the qualitative component. Part two is given priority in the current study as it contains in-depth information related to the construction of wellbeing in relation to work, welfare and social justice issues. Interviews were considered to be a vital element in this research to confirm, elaborate and provide further understanding of the construction of wellbeing for solo mothers. This chapter includes research questions formulated specifically for the qualitative part of the study as well as the method used to obtain the information. Comprehensive findings and interpretations from interviews are also presented summarised in chapter eight.

An overall discussion of the findings of the two parts of the current study is presented in chapter nine. The implications of the findings are discussed. The limitations and strengths of the current study are acknowledged in this chapter and future research opportunities are discussed.

The current study is intended to provide detailed understanding regarding wellbeing of solo mothers in relation to Welfare to Work reforms. In order to provide this information, work and social justice were considered to be paramount factors to be examined in relation to legislative change. The examination of the abovementioned factors also incorporated the complex and dynamic ways in which barriers, strengths and supports interact to underpin the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers.

Chapter One

Solo Mothers and Identity

Solo mothers are becoming more common within Australian society. This is partly because some women are choosing to parent alone, but also due to other reasons, such as death of a partner, separation or divorce. Regardless of the reasons for solo parenting, the media have been responsible for sensationalist and sometimes erroneous portrayal of solo mothers in society. This in turn has led to stigma and stereotyping. The moral, social and cultural norms of Australian society have also been integral to the stigmatisation experienced by solo mothers. However, changes in Australian society are now leading to a gradual acceptance of solo mother headed families as legitimate family types. This chapter explains aspects of female identity construction and the influence of roles undertaken by females. Role conflict and multiple roles are examined with emphasis on the impact on identity construction indicating some gaps in knowledge particularly in relation to wellbeing. Challenges experienced by solo mothers in Australian society are highlighted particularly in relation to stereotyping highlighting the need for further research in this area.

The construction of identity is complex for any individual as there are many factors that may influence that construction. For solo mothers it may be even more complex given the changes in society over the last century and a woman's place in the world. Moral, social and cultural norms influence how a solo mother's identity is constructed and how it is perceived within the community.

Female Identity

Identity and roles are intertwined and complex constructs. However, identity and role can be explained as internal and external constructs respectively. Identity is an internal construction, specific to each individual according to Stryker and Burke (2000), and many identities may exist for an individual. A role is more often a social expectation of how an individual should behave and hence is an external construction. Externally constructed roles may influence the internal construction of identity and vice versa. For example, the way in which an individual presents in a role is often matched to the perceptions expected by others in society, thereby forming a socially constructed identity (Simpson & Carroll, 2008).

Multiple identities exist for most, if not all people in modern society and the identities are often linked to roles (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). For example, a woman who plays a role as a daughter, a sister, employee and student, may also describe these as her identities. Although the distinction between roles and identities is often overlooked, a role does not always correspond to an identity (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Indeed some roles may be contradictory to an individual's identity. For example, a solo mother may be required to take on typical father roles in addition to her own role as mother. In this case a father role would not change the mother's identity (Kroska, 2009).

While it is accepted that many individuals have multiple identities, not all are considered equally important. Multiple identities have a hierarchy according to the importance placed upon each role, with the more salient role being one that will endure

(Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, if a woman identifies primarily as a mother, this identity is considered to be the most important above other identities she constructs such as employee, sister or friend, with her identity as a mother being at the top of the hierarchy. However, if her identity as an employee has a similar ranking to that of a mother, she may experience some conflict in her priorities.

Henry (2007, p.274) explained the conundrum regarding multiple identities and roles: "...many women today seem to be in a conflicted state, torn between very traditional and stereotypical ideas about who and what they ought to be and rather progressive and liberating concepts of who and what they can be." Certainly, many females who can identify as mothers and career women are faced with conflicting societal arguments for both to be a primary role; however, the role of a "good mother" has traditionally been socially constructed as mutually exclusive with the identity of a career woman (Johnston & Swanson, 2003).

Some women may also risk some role confusion and jeopardise the ability to carry out duties of one or both roles if an attempt is made to have two identities of similar salience. As such, women with well paid jobs that have opportunity for advancement may consider motherhood an obstacle. For example, if a woman is employed with opportunity for promotion, then leaves for a short period in order to give birth, she may be overlooked for promotion within her workplace. Indeed, results from a study by Hand and Hughes (2004) investigating the preferred time/age to have children, indicated the women in the study to be in favour of having children later in life, after a career has been established or at least qualifications have been obtained. Such a strategy may indeed assist women to experience both roles in sequence rather than simultaneously, thus lessening the conflict in priorities.

Mothering may compromise a woman's chances of advancement in the workplace due to time away from the workplace, personal leave requirements and

family obligations (Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004). Further, mothers are generally employed in a part time capacity, thus risking career advancement and financial penalty including foregone earnings lost including superannuation, whilst attending to unpaid child care responsibilities (Gray & Chapman, 2001; Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004). However, as Simon (1992) suggested, motherhood is the socio-cultural norm for many westernised countries and women are socialised to this role from an early age.

Construction of women's identity was also investigated by Johnston, Swanson and Luidens (2008). Johnston et al. (2008) found that daughters reflect on their mother's employee-mother identity to determine their own identity in relation to parenting and/or paid work. However, it should be noted that the results were not necessarily indicative of daughters aligning with the mother's identity. The daughters chose an identity that aligned, rejected or selected aspects of the mother's identity. Furthermore, Johnston and colleagues noted there are other contextual factors such as socio-economic status, support and availability of paid work affecting the employee-mother identity of women. Moreover, this particular study included a majority (98%) of partnered mothers, perhaps not being reflective of all mothers.

Although a common expectation in modern society is that a woman will be a mother (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003) some women make a conscious decision not to have children (Richardson, 1993). The reasons for not taking on the role of motherhood are many and may include a dislike of children, a fear of being unable to mother to a high standard (Richardson, 1993) or simply a preference to pursue a career in the workplace (Hakim, 1998; 2003; Richardson, 1993). Newman (2008) cited greater workforce participation along with higher education as being important factors in decisions to delay or forgo motherhood. Further, some women are ambivalent about having children (Frost & Darroch, 2008) and may intentionally delay having children while making the decision.

Some women's identity is closely tied to the role of being a mother, for others, being identified as a mother is not their primary identity, but rather, one imposed. Although changing, traditional western society expectation is that a mother will stay at home in the early weeks following giving birth to care for the child. Shared parenting is not a traditional western expectation, nor is a father role as primary carer expected. Mothers are still the main caregivers for children, especially for children under the age of five years (ABS, 2009).

The reasons why women want to become mothers are varied. One of the more common reasons women become mothers is connected to cultural upbringing or societal norms (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). McClain (2007) also asserted some women seek motherhood in order to have a "good life"; however, it is unclear what is meant by a good life. Some indications are that women (particularly those from lower socioeconomic groups) have children to provide them with a purpose in life and to make them feel worthwhile (Richardson, 1993) and so perhaps this is perceived as a good life.

However, even among women who become mothers, or desire to become mothers, there is a range of differing perceptions. For example, Richardson (1993) indicated there are expectations in society that women who are lesbians should not have children but rather, it is normal to be both heterosexual and desire children/motherhood. The Howard government, in office from 1996 to 2007, perpetuated this myth by stating that every child has a right to have a mother and a father (Short, 2007). Dominant social views in the recent past held that lesbian women should not have children because there is not a resident father. Moreover, lesbians were not traditionally perceived to have a maternal instinct as did married or partnered heterosexual women (Richardson, 1993). Indeed it was difficult in the past for single and/or lesbian women to gain support to undergo in-vitro fertilisation or donor insemination in order to conceive (Richardson,

1993; Short, 2007). However, single women and lesbian women are now able to access donor insemination, and if infertile, are able to access in-vitro fertilisation (Reproduction Technologies Council, 2010). Further, since 2009, the Australian Government has recognised same sex couples and their children by Commonwealth law and same sex couples now have the same entitlements as other de facto couples (Australian Government, 2009). Same-sex parents are becoming more common and pose some challenges to existing cultural norms within Australia as well as legal concerns such as the rights of the biological father and the non-birth mother (Short, 2007). As such, there is further opportunity for research in this area to inform policy and legislation.

Solo mothers.

Just as lesbian mothers can be discriminated against, solo motherhood is not celebrated as is heterosexually partnered motherhood. Richardson (1993) asserted a common perception is that a single woman gives birth for selfish reasons such as wanting to feel needed or to keep her partner with her. Further, a single woman who gives birth may be perceived as having “made a mistake” rather than choosing to be a solo parent, thus challenging societal norms (Richardson, 1993). There is some agreement by academics though, that single parenthood may not be a planned circumstance but rather, is an outcome of risk taking behaviour and social disadvantage (e.g. Bullen, Kenway, & Hay, 2000). Although some media rhetoric has also intimated young women become pregnant to receive the “baby bonus”, an untaxed, means tested payment provided to Australian mothers on the birth of their baby, Bullen et al. (2000) suggested a myth such as this serves only to further stigmatise solo mothers.

Nevertheless, solo motherhood is becoming more widely accepted due in part to media and celebrity women choosing to have children without a partner (e.g. Jodie Foster; Sandra Bullock; Mia Farrow). Increasingly, women choosing to be solo mothers

are likely to be in a stable career, have financial security and access to services to assist parenting (McClain, 2007).

Although it is becoming more common for women to choose solo parenting, more often women are thrust into solo parenting as a result of death of a partner, separation or divorce (Steil, 2001). Rawsthorne's (2006) qualitative study of 23 Australian women on partnered or single parenting payments revealed the mothers and their families in the study were often in a state of flux often changing from being a partnered to solo mother and returning to a partnered status. Approximately 44 percent of relationship breakdowns among the participants in Rawsthorne's study were attributed to domestic violence and approximately 23 percent to financial strain. Significant events such as illness or disability were also identified as sometimes leading to conflict and ensuing separation or divorce (Rawsthorne). Whilst Rawsthorne's study is small, and not necessarily transferable to all families, it serves to provide a snapshot of why some relationships break down.

Rahav and Baum (2002) argued that divorced women are faced with role confusion and challenges to identity centred on the changes to the parenting and provider role. As recently as the last decade, a mother was expected to primarily engage in mothering activities. However, upon divorce or solo mothering the solo mother was often faced with choices to engage in several previously unpractised roles that a father would have undertaken (Rahav & Baum, 2002). Further, as Webber and Boromeo (2005) discovered in their qualitative study comprising 10 solo parents (one solo father and nine solo mothers) solo parents may be victims of erroneous perceptions and negative stereotyping of others. It is interesting to note widowed solo parents were less susceptible to perceived negative stereotyping and were more likely to maintain original friends (Webber & Boromeo, 2005). As such, identity construction for solo mothers

may be further complicated, depending on individual circumstances and indeed may affect wellbeing.

Ahrens and Ryff (2006) asserted multiple roles can also enhance wellbeing, particularly if the individual perceived having control over circumstances and greater autonomy. Ahrens and Ryff investigated the effects of multiple roles in terms of wellbeing, positive affect and perceived control in a sample of 3032 participants from the United States aged between 25 and 74 years. Multiple regression analysis determined higher education predicted multiple roles, which in turn enhanced the wellbeing of the participants in the study. Ahrens and Ryff asserted multiple roles were likely to result in increased social integration and improve interpersonal relationships. However, Ahrens and Ryff's study did not control for marital status, having only codes for married or not married rather than other relationship types. Studies in Australia have indicated solo mothers are more likely to suffer significantly lower levels of wellbeing in comparison to other groups (Cummins, Woerner, Tomy, Gibson, & Knapp, 2005). Many solo mothers undertake multiple roles through necessity and also choice, thus it is possible multiple roles for solo mothers in Australia do not enhance wellbeing and may indeed have a negative effect, thus identifying the need for further research in this area. In the following chapter, numerous factors affecting wellbeing, including the effects of multiple roles, will be discussed.

Chapter Two

Wellbeing

The literature suggests that subjective wellbeing is lower for individuals who are separated or divorced due to the lack or absence of the protective factor of positive relationships. In addition, solo mother headed families in particular, have higher levels financial stress, deprivation and social exclusion compared to other family groups, which also adversely affects subjective wellbeing. Solo mothers are also more susceptible to mental health problems and also have less personal time. The aim of this chapter is to explore the construct of wellbeing and to differentiate between the utility of measuring subjective wellbeing in comparison to measuring objective wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing is examined in detail including the theory of homeostasis and set point of wellbeing. Major factors affecting the wellbeing of solo mothers are also discussed.

Solo mothers are a group generally considered to experience lower levels of wellbeing regardless of how the construct is measured. Lower levels of wellbeing are of concern to a developed nation such as Australia as it indicates shortcomings in the ways solo parents, and solo mothers in particular, are assisted in society by the Federal Government, welfare agencies and the general population. Lower levels of wellbeing also reflect fewer opportunities and perhaps even more barriers to achieving a greater sense of wellbeing.

Definition of Wellbeing

According to Wallace and Shapiro (2006, p.699) wellbeing is “a way of engaging with life based on a wholesome way of life, mental balance, and a sound understanding of reality”. Wallace and Shapiro suggested wellbeing is a mental state of being characterised by goals and commitment; sustained attention or mindfulness; awareness of the body, senses, feelings, state of mind and environment; as well as freedom from excessive emotions.

Wallace and Shapiro’s definition is Buddhist in origin, and promotes tenets of positive psychology, such as strengths and virtues including self control, moderation and wisdom (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (ABS) definition of wellbeing however, is more concrete and relies more on measureable concepts. The ABS considered wellbeing to be a state of health and adequacy in aspects of life such as environment, both natural and man-made; relationships and social standing; and human consciousness encompassing cultural traditions, norms, and beliefs (Trewin, 2001). Issues such as financial stress, unemployment, educational achievement, and family type are just some of the factors that the ABS investigates to determine wellbeing. Just as the definition of wellbeing can differ according to focus, it can also be measured in different ways.

Measuring Wellbeing

Wellbeing can be measured objectively and/or subjectively. An objective measure of wellbeing frequently uses quantitative measures such as frequencies and quantities. For example, the ABS uses frequencies to measure the wellbeing of Australians. Information is normally gathered during census data collections to provide a map of different issues. The data gathered from census can provide information on where vulnerable groups of people live and also the trends for areas (Trewin, 2001). Further, the statistics gathered from census information can inform policy to establish funding for different groups, especially those that are marginalised.

As can be seen in Figure 1, census data related to wellbeing includes information on social indicators that help to map change over time and if the change is positive or negative. Social and individual factors are also examined to determine the effect on wellbeing. These factors may include education or disability, and social economic climate. Social issues such as financial hardship, crime and homelessness are also important factors to measure wellbeing and highlight areas in society which are most in need of attention. Further, the population groups most affected by salient social issues are identified to examine the level of real and potential disadvantage. The census data are mostly gathered as counting units such as number of people, families, households and so forth. The data are then used within statistical frameworks to show relationships between certain factors and to identify where services and changes are most needed.

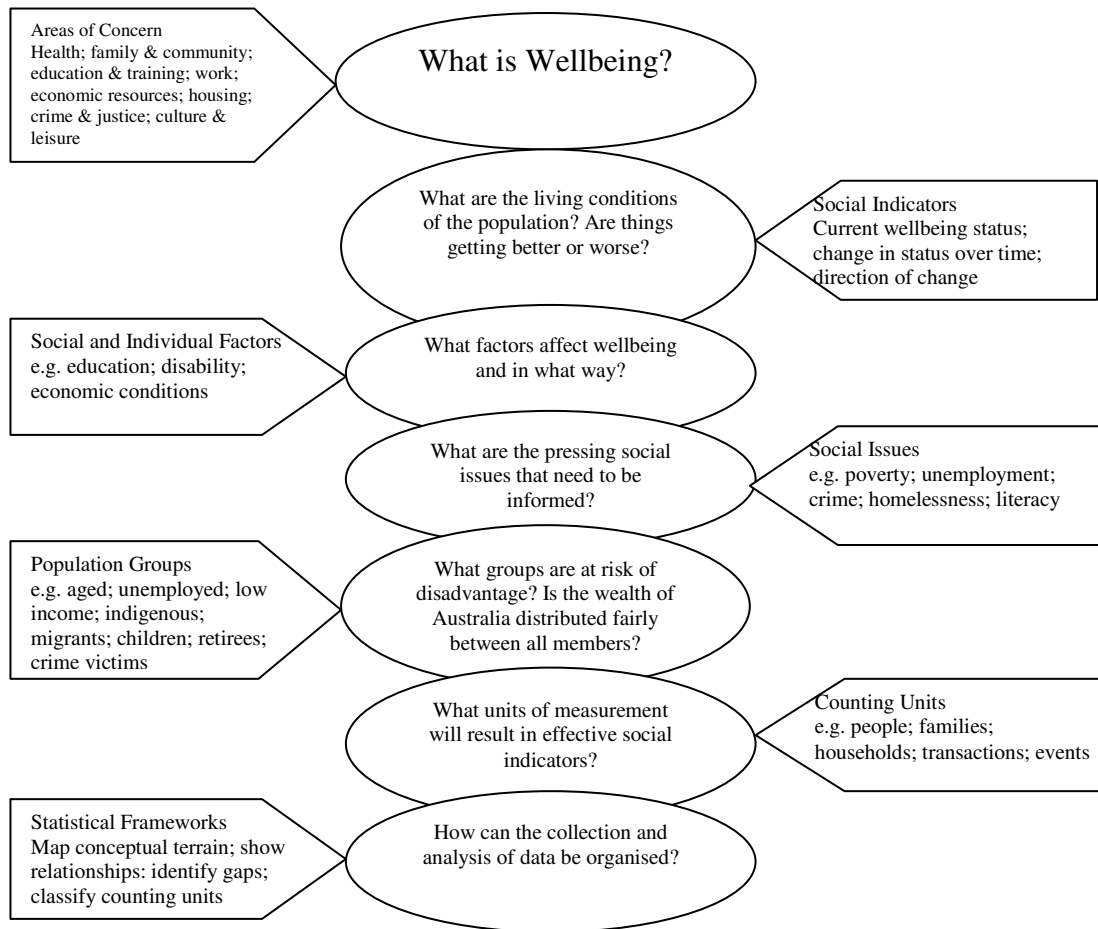


Figure 1. ABS System of Social Statistics. Adapted from “Measuring wellbeing:

Framework for Australian Social Statistics” by D. Trewin, 2001, ABS Catalogue no.

4160.0, p. 5. Copyright 2001 by Commonwealth of Australia

Although objective measures of wellbeing are useful in illustrating overall states of predefined wellbeing, they lack an indication of subjective wellbeing, or how an individual feels about his or her own wellbeing (Cummins et al., 2003). Subjective wellbeing measures are important as they are able to provide richer information about how an individual feels about, and evaluates, personal circumstances (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998).

Subjective Wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing can be measured using scales that investigate the level of satisfaction in different life domains. For example, a question of satisfaction with achievements in life provides information regarding subjective satisfaction and so is reliant upon the individual's perceptions rather than an objective measure of achievement. Thus, subjectivity is reliant upon individual constructions that may be influenced by culture, education, family expectations and society. Subjective wellbeing comprises many diverse facets of life and as such may be influenced at different times by various circumstances (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Factors can be "teased out" by asking questions in different domains such as satisfaction with relationships or satisfaction with health or standard of living (Cummins et al., 2003; Evans & Kelley, 2004). There is limited scope for objective measures to determine an individual's level of wellbeing, given that they depend on values that an "expert" holds most important.

According to Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003) subjective wellbeing results from cognitive-affective factors and is informed by how an individual evaluates life satisfaction using cognitive and emotional processes. For instance, subjective wellbeing can be described as how satisfied an individual is with a certain circumstance (cognitive) as well as the presence of positive emotions (affect) regarding those circumstances. Although affect appears to influence subjective wellbeing, Diener et al. (1999) maintained that current mood at the time of a survey does not necessarily have much influence unless it is longstanding. Subjective wellbeing is dependent also on the values each individual holds. For example, some individuals may value connections with others more highly than standard of living (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998).

The degree of subjective wellbeing that is perceived by individuals can be influenced by personality traits such as neuroticism or extraversion (Cummins et al., 2003; Diener et al., 2003) and locus of control (Stewart, 2005) as well as cultural factors

(Diener et al., 2003; Lau, Cummins, & McPherson, 2005). Diener et al. (2003) explained subjective wellbeing is predominantly accounted for by personality traits and even though subjective wellbeing often fluctuated with major life events, the change was short term. However, other research (see for example, Carroll, 2005; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004) indicated some long term major life events may have a significant and lasting effect on subjective wellbeing.

Homeostasis and set point of wellbeing.

Cummins et al. (2003) suggested that subjective wellbeing is homeostatic and although circumstances may drive an individual's subjective wellbeing downwards, it is usually only a temporary event. Cummins et al. stated personality has much to do with homeostasis of subjective wellbeing and an individual's sense of control over situations, self-esteem and optimism will inevitably keep subjective wellbeing stable (Cummins, 2000). Mastery and goal setting may also be vital to homeostasis of wellbeing (Diener et al., 1998). Further, Cummins et al. maintained an individual's inherent predisposition to believing he or she is more fortunate than others assists to keep subjective wellbeing levels stable and in the positive range.

Interestingly though, Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2004) determined from a study of unemployed people over the course of five years, the set point for subjective wellbeing may be lowered by unemployment in the second year and even though employment was regained in the third year, the set point did not return to the original baseline prior to unemployment. Further, Carroll (2005) indicated that long term unemployment is likely to lead to lower satisfaction with life and thus lower levels of wellbeing. This suggested that major life events can in fact alter the set point for subjective wellbeing. Moreover, the notion that individuals adapt to situations and set point does not have lasting change is challenged (Lucas et al., 2004).

Prolonged adverse circumstances can lower subjective wellbeing significantly over a longer period of time. For example, for individuals who suffer from chronic pain or disability, subjective wellbeing may decline although adaptation to circumstances can partially restore an individual's sense of wellbeing (Diener et al., 1999). Diener et al. (1999) asserted the degree of restoration of subjective wellbeing is affected by an evaluation of an individual's circumstances according to previous experience, goals and values.

Although global subjective wellbeing may have a homeostatic set point as described by Cummins et al. (2003), when specific domains are examined, homeostasis is threatened. Indeed Cummins et al. stated the more specific, or less abstract personal domains are, the more likely it is that wellbeing will be sensitive to change. For example, in the domain of personal relationships, wellbeing is very sensitive to change particularly when a relationship is being threatened.

Major influences in subjective wellbeing.

Evidence provided by Scutella and Wooden's (2005) research indicated lower levels of wellbeing for individuals who had left, or been left by, a partner and even lower levels of wellbeing for divorced individuals. Individuals in couple relationships seem to have higher levels of wellbeing overall (Cummins, Woerner, Tomy, Gibson, & Knapp, 2005). Hughes and Stone (2006) suggest men have are more satisfied with life if they are married and are in the provider role. Similarly, Evan and Kelley's (2004) analysis of the differences between married, de facto, single and widowed people found that subjective wellbeing changes along with circumstance. For example, married people who have a moderate to high level of subjective wellbeing may experience a dramatic decline in wellbeing following divorce. Indeed, Blanchflower and Oswald (2005) suggest relationship breakdown as being one of the most distressing events through life and Cummins (2006) asserts men are often more adversely affected than

women. With the advent of a new relationship however, divorced people may experience a rise in their subjective wellbeing to the same level as single people (Evans & Kelly, 2004). Further, remarriage can re-establish the level of subjective wellbeing to levels similar to when previously married (Evans & Kelley).

Another circumstance that appears to impact subjective wellbeing is that of paid employment. For example Carroll (2005) found that both Australian men and women's subjective wellbeing (operationally defined as level of satisfaction and measured by the question "all things considered, how satisfied are you with your life? Pick a number between 0 and 10) declined in line with unemployment and those with a higher rating of subjective wellbeing were more likely to be employed. Similarly, Lucas et al. (2004) also provided evidence that unemployed individuals were likely to have lower levels of subjective wellbeing than employed counterparts.

Socioeconomic disadvantage appears to play a role in subjective wellbeing for many groups of people including mothers of disabled children who are unable to find employment due to caregiver priorities (Emerson, Hatton, Llewellyn, Blacker, & Graham, 2006). Further, families who are reliant on welfare may experience notable financial stress and resultant social deprivation and social exclusion (Saunders & Adelman, 2006). Interestingly, Headey and Wooden (2004) determined that net worth rather than income was more likely to influence subjective wellbeing of Australians. In other words, while income is important, it is the security of other forms of wealth, such as insurance plans, assets, superannuation and no debt, that influence subjective wellbeing. It is interesting to note however, that such research tends to explore subjective wellbeing only as a global measure correlating the score with other measures rather than determining subjective wellbeing in terms of satisfaction with income or socioeconomic security. In fact, the results from studies using global measures may be unreliable given that specific domains have not been examined (Cummins et al., 2003).

Moreover, Cummins (2008) identified income as being an important protective factor for wellbeing.

Factors affecting the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers.

Given that separated and divorced individuals appear to have lower overall levels of subjective wellbeing, the factors that influence subjective wellbeing should be considered. Studies such as those conducted by Cummins (2006), Evans and Kelly (2004), Ihinger- Tallman (1994), Loxton, Mooney, and Young (2006), Scutella and Wooden (2005) and Zucchelli, Duncan, Harris, and Harris (2010) all indicate lower levels of subjective wellbeing for separated and divorced individuals. This is perhaps not a surprising phenomenon as Cummins (2008) suggested positive relationships as important protective factors of wellbeing. It follows that if there is conflict in relationships leading to separation and divorce, such protective factors may be compromised.

Solo mothers are generally one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australia and experience high levels of financial stress, deprivation and social exclusion compared to other family groups (Saunders & Adelman, 2006). As such, solo mothers may experience higher levels of stress and be more likely to suffer psychological distress (Avison, Ali, & Walters, 2007). Further, many solo mothers are reliant on welfare payments. Butterworth, Fairweather, Anstey, and Windsor (2006) noted reliance on welfare payments often coincided with low socioeconomic status, reduced social support, feeling unsafe, and poor physical health resulting in low levels of wellbeing. Cook (2005) also revealed many solo mothers felt stigmatised by being dependent on welfare payments and suffered from low self esteem. According to Cummins (2000), self esteem is a buffer against decline in levels of wellbeing, thus solo mothers on welfare payments may be at risk of low wellbeing. Cummins (2008) and Carroll (2005) also identified unemployed people, whether looking for paid work or not

looking for paid work, have significantly lower levels of wellbeing, however Carroll stated women appeared to be less affected than were men.

However, it is not necessarily welfare recipients who have lower levels of wellbeing but can also be solo mothers in the workforce. Solo mothers may also be disadvantaged in the workplace due to lack of child care support, inflexible work hours that do not cater for family commitments and being more likely to be offered lower pay for unskilled paid work (Sheen, 2008). Further, solo mothers are typically more prone to mental health issues that may further compromise wellbeing (Butterworth, 2003; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Nevertheless, women are more likely now than in past years to gain satisfaction from paid work (Diener et al., 1999). This is probably also linked to influences such as perceived control (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006), personality traits (Cummins, et al., 2003), job suitability and amount of work/family conflict (Hosking & Western, 2008).

Other factors that feature as determinants of wellbeing for solo mothers are caring for disabled or children with special needs and residential status – renting or owning a home. Cummins (2008) stated carers as a group have the lowest levels of wellbeing detected across all surveys conducted from 2001 to 2008 by the Australian Centre for Quality Of Life (ACQOL). Further, Cummins reported solo parents (both solo mothers and fathers) who owned a home or had a mortgage had much higher levels of wellbeing compared with solo parents who were renting or were dependent on others for housing.

Both income and paid work appear to be important in the construction of wellbeing for solo mothers. Several bodies of research have indicated low income, dependence on welfare payments coupled with expectations of participating in the workforce impact on subjective wellbeing (e.g. Cook, 2005; Cummins, 2008; Hosking

& Western, 2008; Saunders & Adelman, 2006; Sheen, 2008). The following chapter will examine these factors in greater detail.

Chapter Three

Work

Work-family balance is a challenge for many families in Australian society. However, solo mothers have compounded difficulties due to lack of support and flexibility both within the workplace and at home. Further, solo mothers are often torn between the need to work for financial gain and parenting responsibilities. Particular difficulties faced by solo mothers can include negligible financial gain due to high costs of child care, lack of flexibility within the workplace, which can hinder effective parenting and/or career advancement as well as lack of opportunity for well paid work with suitable hours due to lack of skills or training. The acknowledgement that volunteering and parenting are forms of work contributes to valuing such roles in the community. However, allowances provided by the Federal Government to assist parents care for children fall short of recognising the effort and hours required to undertake effective parenting. The purpose of this chapter is to define work, with a particular emphasis on parenting as a type of work and the effects of multiple roles undertaken by parents. Determinants for women to enter paid employment and issues surrounding solo mothers entering or maintaining paid employment are discussed. Gaps in research, such as the effects of multiple roles for women, volunteering roles as work for solo mothers are also identified.

A focus of the Australian Federal Government is to assist solo parents to engage in paid work once the youngest child turns six years old. This is mainly in response to the RGWR that indicated some groups typically on welfare payments (i.e. solo parents; disabled) were perpetuating a culture of poor communities of people on welfare payments. The growth of poor communities was occurring despite a national increase in economic wealth, which was persisting along with an increase in joblessness (RGWR, 2000).

However, there have been several arguments as to what work really means, especially for solo parents, the factors that influence participation in paid work activities such as barriers and supports, and historical trends. Simplistically, it may appear that work is driven by financial reward, yet work is a more complex construct that is necessarily determined by an individual's own perceptions.

Definition of Work

There appears to be substantial research concerning work and work practices, however definitions of work within peer reviewed journals are more difficult to locate. Nevertheless, some definitions were found. For example, Boris (1998) defined paid work as being a specific duty that attracts a reward, thus enabling a person to earn a living. Similarly, Morse and Weiss, in their 1955 paper reporting the results of a study of the purpose and meaning of work and jobs, proposed that work for many people may be defined as "the means towards the end of earning a living" (p. 191). Morse and Weiss also acknowledged that this was a simplified definition and work could also encompass meanings such as an activity that provides interest, enjoyment and protection against boredom. The study which More and Weiss reported upon, however, utilised the answers to questions posed to 401 men from the United States. Given the era in which these interviews took place and the exclusion of females from the study, this definition may not be as salient for today's society. Indeed, Glezer and Wolcott

(1997) suggested there were expectations as late as the 1980s that men were the main breadwinners in the family. Further, Glezer and Wolcott indicated a standard working week of approximately 40 hours increased over time and with changing economic circumstances and opportunity, women were more likely to enter the workforce, either on a part time or full time basis.

Lewis (2003) also posited that work can be satisfying, stimulating, elicit a sense of fulfilment, and may also enhance the status of the individual. Hence, a definition of work may include economic gain as well as enhancement of wellbeing. By contrast though, Lewis suggested work, whether paid or unpaid can be stressful and inconsistent with an individual's core identity particularly when there is a work-family imbalance.

The Britannica Encyclopaedia (1988) explained that work is intellectually satisfying, and is important in the exchange of social products and the maintenance of community life. Further, the growth of communities and countries relies on progress that is vital to being able to cope with increasing economic and social demands. Work as an entity is also changeable, with focus necessarily changing in response to demands of society. For example, there has been a greater emphasis on balancing family life and work in recent years, thus requiring a change in work practices to become more family friendly and flexible (European Work Organisation Network [EWON], 2001).

Throughout the current study, the term paid work will be used for working for income such as in paid employment, while all unpaid work including parenting work and volunteer work will be referred to as work. Although work is generally perceived as paid employment, Lewis (2003) asserted work is time that is duty-bound and may be paid or unpaid. As such, the unpaid duties of parenting, household tasks and preparing meals in the home can all be defined as forms of unpaid work (Boris, 1998) just as can volunteering be defined (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Thoits and Hewitt (2001) described

volunteering as work which can be rewarding and carry with it, responsibilities and duties.

Volunteering as work.

The value placed on each type of work differs according to individual values, aspirations and expectations. Volunteering is by definition, work without pay but is vital to many communities and agencies (Freeman, 1997; Wilson & Musick, 1997).

Volunteer work is frequently productive work. If certain activities were not carried out by volunteers, then the work would have to be relinquished or alternatively, agencies and organisations would need to employ paid workers to perform the work (Freeman, 1997). Australian principles for volunteering though indicate volunteer work is not to be undertaken at the expense of employees conducting paid work (Volunteering Australia, 2009a).

Volunteering is an important occupation in Australian society as work is of benefit to both community and the individual engaged in volunteering. Further, volunteering provides the opportunity to participate more fully in communities (Volunteering Australia, 2009a). As with any commitment, volunteering has responsibilities and an awareness of policies and procedures of the organisation supporting the volunteer worker is essential to promote reliable and safe work practice (Volunteering Australia, 2009b).

The reasons why individuals volunteer time and skills to organisations are varied. Freeman (1997) conducted a meta-analysis of two major studies in the United States (1989 Current Population Survey and 1990 Independent Sector's Gallup Poll of Giving and Volunteering) with 78,000 and 2,200 participants respectively. In this meta-analysis, Freeman sought to understand why people volunteer, and what effect income may have on volunteering.

The results of Freeman's (1997) study noted that whether in paid employment or not, most people will only do volunteer work when requested. Certainly, this is corroborated by anecdotal evidence of volunteers indicating engagement in volunteering after being personally asked rather than if a general impersonal request had been made (Bryen, 2007). It seems likely then, that school canteens and Parents and Citizens groups in schools, are more likely to have parents volunteering if asked personally by teachers or other parents to contribute to these volunteering roles. Indeed, the smooth running and financial success of schools is often dependent upon the volunteer roles of parents (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005). Further, parents with school age children who are not in the paid workforce may be more likely to volunteer at schools than in other volunteer roles (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). This is a possible avenue of research which may indicate alternatives to paid employment that potentially lead to greater social inclusion.

Although volunteering is not necessarily altruistic, it certainly means that time is given to an activity for no direct monetary gain (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Interestingly though, people engaged in volunteer work frequently report a sense of wellbeing as a result of volunteer activities. This was demonstrated in an analysis of a two-wave study with 3,617 participants in the first wave during 1986 and 2,867 in the second wave in 1989 (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). The variables measured included well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, mastery and physical health among other socio-demographic variables. Nevertheless, Thoits and Hewitt also found people who were happy, had higher self-esteem and who higher levels of wellbeing were more likely to volunteer. Further, Thoits and Hewitt also revealed that people with a higher education were more likely to volunteer. Freeman (1997) found that people in higher income brackets and with potentially less time, volunteer more often than people with a lower income. Similarly, unemployed people are less likely to volunteer even though there is

potentially more available time for them to do so (Freeman, 1997; Levy, 2006; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). By contrast, Mitchell (2006) stated those volunteers not in paid work are more likely to work longer hours than volunteers engaged in paid work.

Parenting as work.

Similar to volunteering, parenting is also unpaid work. Parenting and mothering are both considered to be “work” by feminist standards (Bailey, 2000). Parenting involves the work of bringing up children, keeping the house running, and organisation of household activities (Morehead, 2002). The most common family type in Australia comprises two parents and children (ABS, 2006). As with most westernised countries, the traditional role for the father has been that of breadwinner while the mother was generally more focussed on caring for the home and family (Glezer & Wolcott, 1997; Sayer, 2005). With increased economic pressures and demands for women to have equal opportunities, more mothers are engaging in paid employment, thus challenging the traditional roles within the family (Glezer & Wolcott, 1997).

As previously noted, not all work or employment, for example caring for children or volunteer work, attracts financial reward, but often represents significant responsibilities (Von Doussa, 2006). Parenting is largely unpaid work, although the Australian Government does recognise that families may need financial assistance with the costs of raising children (Australian Government, 2010). For example, the Family Assistance Office assists families with the Family Tax Benefit, a benefit paid to all families who have dependent children and otherwise earn below a specified amount. At the time of writing the current paper, families were eligible for Family Tax Benefit A if income received was less than \$97,845 per annum. Families that only have one main income are also eligible for Family Tax Benefit B. Solo parents receive the Family Tax Benefit B regardless of income as long as dependent children are aged less than 16 years or 18 years if the child is still a fulltime student. Other benefits available to

families are the Child Care Benefit, Child Care Tax Rebate, Baby Bonus, as well as Large Family Supplement for families with more than three children and Multiple Birth Allowance (Australian Government, 2010).

Although there is a myriad of allowances and benefits available to families, the amounts received do not reflect the hours of work involved in parenting. However, parents are responsible for the day to day care of children, as well as running a household. Further, parents have a duty of care to their children, to ensure their safety and wellbeing, which is not always an easy task (Department for Community Development, 2010). Parents need to be able to provide food, shelter, love and care in order to allow children to develop and thrive. Parenting is indeed very responsible and important work as it provides children with skills and attributes to become responsible adults (Department for Community Development, 2010). Further, researchers such as Ainsworth (1989) and Lugo-Gil and Tamis-LeMonda (2008) asserted a parent is the most influential person to a young child and so is responsible for establishing the “blueprint” or foundations of how the child will function as an adult.

However, other caregivers may be involved in children’s development, especially for those children whose parents are in paid employment. As part of a larger study, Love et al. (2003) analysed the results of an Australian study in regards to children in care settings and their socio-emotional development. The Australian study utilised a sample of 147 first time mothers in a six year longitudinal study with a correlational design. Children of the mothers were placed in formal (regulated) and informal care centres. Measurements were taken when the child was 12 months to examine infant-mother attachment; at 30 months and five years to rate behavioural problems at these stages and finally at six years of age to measure adjustment to school. Love et al. found from their study of children’s development in the context of child care provided informally and formally, that high quality child care could be beneficial in a

child's development. In particular, Love et al. stated stability of care was important for emotional and behavioural regulation. Further, Love et al. suggested high quality child care could also enhance learning competencies. Nevertheless, Love et al. also indicated that for the children in the Australian study, those children who were in longer periods of care up to the age of 30 months, were more likely to have difficulties adjusting to school. However, this finding was less noticeable if the child had been in a regulated formal child care setting. The advantages of quality child care are therefore likely to be an important consideration for mothers who may be required to take on the multiple roles of mother and employee.

Multiple Roles

For many families, work can mean multiple roles of parenting and working in exchange for money in the private and public sectors (Gray & Stanton, 2002). Although it might be expected that a parent at home with the children on a daily basis would have a stronger influence, Huston and Aronson (2005) argued quality time spent with children is the important factor for influential parenting rather than actual time spent with the children. For example, in Huston and Aronson's study of 1,053 American working mothers and their relationships with their young children, it was determined that there was little difference in the quality of time spent with children between mothers in paid employment and those at home full time. Data were collected when the child was 1, 6, 15, 24, and 36 months utilising videotaped interactions and the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) scale (Elardo & Bradley, 1981). This finding was dependent on the working mothers focussing on spending good quality time with the children out of working hours rather than attending to other duties. However, Huston and Aronson cautioned that their sample of mothers included mothers who had chosen to engage in paid work rather than mothers who were coerced or who

worked for pay from sheer necessity. Indeed, some mothers in the paid workforce may experience significant difficulties balancing employment and family.

Historically, women have taken on the parenting role within the family (Burgess & Strachan, 2005; Drago, Pirretti, & Scutella, 2007) and increasingly frequently, are also taking on other roles, such as an employee in the workplace. Drago et al. (2007) stated the majority of mothers with dependent children are working in the paid workforce placing a strain on fulfilment of responsibility to care for dependent children. Gray and Stanton (2002) examined the trends of numbers of mothers in the paid workforce and found there was a steady increase as the children grew so that by the time dependent children reached the age of 15, almost 70 percent of mothers were in the paid workforce. The majority of mothers in the paid workforce prior to children reaching 18 years of age were couple mothers (Gray, Qu, Rhenda, & de Vaus, 2003).

Although there are appreciable numbers of mothers in the paid workforce, most of the household chores are still performed by the mother (Gray & Stanton, 2002). Sayer (2008) described a “two shifts” system for many women, working in paid employment and then coming home to the second shift of unpaid work. In couple families though, there is increasingly more father involvement with children (Sayer, 2005). In order to cope with the multiple roles of mother and employee, many mothers seek to work in part time employment to ensure a family life-work balance (Gray & Stanton, 2002). Unfortunately, according to Saunders (2006), part time paid work is insufficient to financially sustain a family, particularly a solo parent family, and full time paid work is essential to keep a family from experiencing severe financial stress. Even so, full time paid work for some mothers – especially solo mothers – may take the form of lower paid positions in hospitality, service industries or clerical work (Siegel & Abbott, 2007). Further, solo mothers are more likely to be offered insecure and/or poorly paid casual work (Sheen, 2008).

Determinants for Women to Work in Paid Employment

Multiple roles may cause conflict of preferences for such women. For example, Hakim (2003) suggested women have one of three lifestyle preferences: work-centred (paid employment), home-centred or adaptive. Work-centred and home-centred lifestyle preferences are clearly delineated, whereas the adaptive lifestyle preference is more flexible and amenable to change.

A work-centred preference refers to women who prefer to be working in the paid workforce, regardless of parenthood. Hakim (2003) suggested that work-centred women are more likely to prioritise family duties as secondary and as a result family activities are fit in around paid work. Further, work-centred women frequently choose not to have children and prefer to focus on career (Hakim, 2003).

Home-centred women, on the other hand, are more likely to have children and to stay at home to raise their children. Brown and Joyce (2007) stated for some women, parenting was a full time job in itself and so outside paid work was not a priority. Increasingly, however, this has become more difficult in both couple families and solo parent families, as the costs of living continue to rise and more income is required to live in comfort (Gray, Qu, de Vaus, & Millward, 2003; Hughes, 2005).

Women who are able to balance both paid work and family are considered to be those with an adaptive preference and are happy in both roles of parent and employee (Hakim, 2003). According to Pettit and Hook (2005), women with adaptive lifestyle preferences are most common. However, there is also the distinct possibility that there are many more factors involved than merely preferences.

The three lifestyle preferences that Hakim (2003) described also have implications in terms of marriage, education and skills. Women who are work-centred are less likely to be married, however they are more likely to be well educated and possess highly developed work skills (Hakim, 2003). Conversely, Hakim suggests

women who are either adaptive or have a home-centred preference are more likely to be married and also more likely to be dependent on the partner for financial security.

Women with a home-centred preference may have less education in comparison to work-centred women and also less work skills (Bojer, 2001; Hakim, 2003). The lack of education and work skills may be an impediment to paid employment if, for instance, the woman is suddenly without a partner through divorce or death or if it becomes necessary for the woman to seek employment to support the family (Bojer, 2002). Further, Baxter (2005) suggested mothers are less likely to be in the paid workforce after the birth of their first born if the mother has not completed secondary schooling compared to mothers who have completed secondary school or tertiary education.

According to Glezer and Wolcott's (1997) report on information gathered from the Australian Family Life Course Study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 1996, approximately two thirds of both Australian men and women believe both partners should do paid work to provide income. However, the report also highlighted that women are more likely not to be in the paid workforce following childbirth in order to take care of the children thus indicating that the father was the economic provider (Glezer & Wolcott). Glezer and Wolcott's report also highlighted the conflict that mothers may have in regards to a preference to do paid work but being unable to because of family commitments and responsibility.

Interestingly, Smyth, Rawsthorne, and Siminski (2006) report on mothers transitioning to paid employment indicated that many mothers, including solo mothers, chose to do paid work in order to provide a positive role model for their children. Smyth et al. (2006) study incorporated in-depth interviews with 20 Australian mothers from diverse backgrounds including Aboriginal and mothers from non-English speaking backgrounds. The majority of the women who participated in the study were in full time employment prior to childbearing and returned to either part time or full time

employment. However, there were also factors that influenced the mothers' decisions regarding paid work including availability of child care, matching child care hours with work hours, financial concerns, flexibility in the workplace and home/work balance (Smyth, Rawsthorne & Siminski, 2006).

The ability to choose to do paid work could indeed be valuable. For example, Markus and Schwartz (2010, p.344) asserted that "choice is essential to autonomy, which is absolutely fundamental to well-being". However, Markus and Schwartz also noted choice has different meanings and is also culturally modified, so lack of choice for some may be perceived as acceptable, while for others it can threaten an individual's sense of wellbeing. The converse may also be true with a wide variety of choices being more acceptable to some than others.

Transitioning to paid work was a choice that was often made difficult by several factors. For example, solo mothers in the Smyth and colleagues' (2006) study also found the transition difficult because of absence of partner support, juggling the child care arrangements, paid work commitments and other domestic duties. Brown and Joyce (2007) also suggested there could be some financial transition difficulties for solo mothers as welfare payments declined when more income was earned. Indeed, Gray, Qu, de Vaus, et al. (2003) suggested moving from welfare payments to paid work could result in negligible benefits once the costs of employment were considered. Further, Walters (2002) implied solo mothers may be further disadvantaged with increased financial stress a real possibility. Lincare (2007) stated financial stress is often indicated when families spend more money than is being earned, and increased financial hardship can be indicated by inability to pay all of the bills on time through to not being able to heat the home.

Apart from lifestyle preferences, internal conflict can also arise from values that hold families to be important, and likewise that hold employment important (Burgess &

Strachan, 2005). With ever increasing paid work hours, some parents find it difficult to balance both employment and family responsibilities (Callister, 2005) and this may be an area for further research. Nevertheless, the availability of assistance, both financial and practical, may alleviate some concerns for mothers who have taken on dual roles of employee and parent.

Although preferences are an important factor in determining work patterns, Morehead (2005) argued that they are just part of what determines working patterns among women. According to Morehead, determinants of paid work that women do are more likely to be the supports available, the pressures attached to paid work and family and also the additional labour considerations. For example, Pettit and Hook (2005) argued that mothers are less likely to be employed because of lack of readily available formal childcare as well as non-provision of maternity leave. Further, lack of family support, may make working in the paid workforce more difficult particularly if a mother is a solo parent (Morehead, 2002).

Morehead's (2002) qualitative study investigated seven solo mothers' experiences following separation and the ability to both do paid work and care for children. Morehead found that solo mothers often have to re-establish livelihood following separation and so support, whether it is from family, friends or employers, is crucial to the ability to do paid work. For example, family and friends can assist with child care or with after school activities, provide social stimulation and psychological support. Employers can support mothers by providing a flexible workplace such as with flexitime, leave during school holiday periods, maternity leave and opportunities to develop skills (Howe & Pidwell, 2004; Morehead, 2002).

Pressures that are often felt by mothers are low levels of support, either material or psychological (Morehead, 2002; Webber & Boromeo, 2005), inflexible workplaces and employers (Howe & Pidwell, 2004), lack of maternity leave, sick leave and parental

leave in casual employment (Millward, 2002), as well as unsuitable work hours (Bell, Brewer, & Phillips, 2007). Other pressures may include the decision of whether it is financially worthwhile to do paid work either part time or full time. For example, studies conducted by Hughes and Hand (2005) and Sheen (2008) found when interviewing mothers about work choices, that deciding to do paid work either full time or part time depended on benefits for which they were eligible and if working would further reduce their standard of living. In essence, many solo mothers considered paid work had to improve the financial situation before accepting a job (Sheen, 2008).

Additional labour considerations are also important as determinants for mothers to enter the paid workforce. Even though mothers are more likely to be employed in the paid workforce than prior to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s, change has been slow in terms of changes to division of domestic labour (Baxter, 2002; Hook, 2004; Morehead, 2002; Morehead, 2005). Mothers remain the more likely parent to carry out domestic duties although there has been some increase in father participation in family life and indeed fathers are more likely to want to participate (Baxter, 2002; Sayer, 2008). Rather than the other partner taking on more domestic duties however, outsourcing domestic work is more likely to be the reason if the mother's domestic workload decreases (Baxter, 2002).

Solo Mothers and Work

Paid work-family conflict may be greater for solo mothers in terms of responsibility to care for children and working for financial gain. For example, Gray, Qu, de Vaus, and Millward (2003) indicated that based on 1996 census data, there is a significantly large difference between the percentage of couple mothers and solo mothers in paid employment, especially when the children are younger than five years of age. However, this difference does change to being negligible when the children reach adulthood.

There are many similar barriers and issues for both partnered and solo mothers and working in the paid workforce. For example, Baxter (2005) illustrated that many of the concerns mothers have about returning to paid work are around responsibility and being there for the children. Other concerns involved finding suitable jobs and child care.

Nevertheless, solo mothers tend to accumulate multiple stressors such as time pressure (Hodgson, Dienhart, & Daly, 2001), mental illness (Butterworth, 2003) and lack of skill development (Papadakis et al., 2008) that impact more substantially upon ability to engage in paid work.

Lack of a partner to assist in the day to day care of children may place much strain upon solo mothers (Smyth et al., 2005). Solo mothers are then required to seek other supports to assist them in parenting their children and caring for children while the mother is at her place of employment (Morehead, 2002). Finding suitable care can be difficult depending on the quality, availability and affordability of child care (Rush, 2006), support networks in place and assistance from family members (Morehead, 2002).

Concerns regarding child care have been the subject of several studies (e.g. Baker, 2008; Cobb-Clark, Lui, & Mitchell, 2000; McCartney, Dearing, Taylor, & Bub, 2007). Child care costs could become prohibitive, particularly if the solo mother is on a low income (Cobb-Clark, et al., 2000). Baker (2008) also suggested the cost of child care was likely to put a strain on the budgets for many solo mothers even though there were rebates available. This is countered though by McCartney et al., (2007) assertion that quality care is more affordable because of rebates. Results of McCartney, et al., (2007) study need to be interpreted with caution however, as it was an American study and only 14 percent of participants were solo mothers.

Bernstein (2001) asserted that mothers in general have poorer perceived states of health than women who are not mothers and that solo mothers are more likely to have health problems overall. Health problems have been shown to be a barrier to work, both paid and unpaid, for mothers and in particular solo mothers (Bernstein, 2001). Indeed solo mothers in general (Loxton, Mooney, & Young, 2006) and those in receipt of income support (i.e. PPS and DSP) have higher rates of mental illness than solo mothers who are in the paid workforce (Butterworth, 2003). Crosier et al. (2007) reported the higher rate of mental illness among solo mothers was most likely due to financial hardship and/or lack of social support thus indicating a need for further research in this area to identify particular specific needs and potential remedies.

Although there is lower paid workforce participation among solo mothers, the rate of participation increases to a rate similar to that of partnered mothers once the youngest child reaches 18 years (Walters, 2001). Further, many solo mothers move to becoming partnered again over time (Gray et al., 2003). In 2008, there were approximately 350,000 solo mothers in Australia not in the paid workforce, either because of unemployment or caring responsibilities. However, by contrast, there were approximately 376,100 solo mothers with children under the age of 15 years, who were employed (ABS, 2009).

Although Howe and Pidwell (2004) disputed that solo mothers should be categorised differently to partnered mothers, and solo and partnered mothers have similar issues (Gray et al., 2003), Webber and Boromeo (2005) appear to disagree. Webber and Boromeo (2005) suggested less available financial and social support for child care is an important factor when examining differences and similarities between solo and partnered mothers. Indeed some mothers interviewed for Webber and Boromeo's (2005) study stated relationships with friends and family became strained following separation and divorce. Also, services were difficult to access for support at

times, either because the mothers did not know they existed or there were obstacles such as poor service in organisations. Changes in relationships and lack of knowledge of available services all affect levels of support available.

Financial support from the non-resident parent may be important for solo mothers. For example, higher amounts of child support may increase the overall standard of living (Taylor & Gray, 2010). Further, in-kind payments such as school fees and mortgage payments can be very beneficial, particularly as these payments are taken into account by the Child Support Agency (Cook, McKenzie, & Knight, 2011). However, Taylor and Gray (2010) also note that there appears to be little evidence that the amount of child support influences the probability that the solo mother will enter the paid workforce. Taylor and Gray consider that for many mothers, the continuance of child support can be uncertain and therefore many solo mothers may not take this into consideration when contemplating entering the paid workforce.

Lack of support from the children's father can impact on a solo mother's capacity to work for pay. While many couple families have involved mothers and fathers, solo mother headed families often lack father engagement. Involved fathers can assist by providing support in the parenting role, thus having a positive effect on children's cognitive and behavioural development (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008) as well as children's socialisation (Russell & Russell, 1987). However, father involvement in solo mother headed families is often thwarted by the gate keeping role in which some solo mothers engage (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Thus, involved support from the children's father may be dependent upon the degree of gate keeping by the solo mother and this in turn may be dependent upon the degree of conflict between parents and the mother's perceived competence of the father (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). As such, solo mothers may rely more on alternative support if the father is not available or the father's assistance is not accepted.

Flexible and family friendly paid work places are important supports for solo mothers (Gray & Tudball, 2002; Millar & Ridge, 2008). Gray and Tudball (2002) considered there were four family friendly paid work practices that could support families. These were flexible start and finish times, access to telephone for family reasons, availability of permanent part time paid work and ability to take time from paid work for family health issues without penalty.

Hosking and Western (2008) suggested part time paid work was less likely to cause work-family balance conflict but Pocock (2005) maintained that women, particularly solo mothers, fill the majority of casual paid work positions, which are notoriously family unfriendly. Further, increasing demands are made in the paid workplace without suitable recompense (Pocock, 2005). Burgess and Connell (2005) also emphasised paid casual work is frequently unpredictable in terms of hours of work, both in hours offered and time of day and is often sought by workers who are less skilled. Further, paid casual work does not provide for sick leave, annual leave, or personal leave, thus creating an insecure work environment.

Although there are many similarities among solo and partnered mothers, solo mothers are less likely to have advanced work skills for employment (Bojer, 2002). Millward (2002), in her comparison study of data for British and Australian families also claimed that mothers were at risk of having their earning potential compromised as they were more likely to have restrictions placed on their paid work choices because of family responsibilities. A similar finding was reported by Sheen (2008) that solo mothers were disadvantaged and even discriminated against in the labour market as often the caring responsibilities took priority over paid work.

Solo mothers are also likely to experience low confidence and self esteem when looking for paid work as a result of underdeveloped skills and little positive reinforcement of ability (Angleton, 2005). Lipman, Kenny, Jack, et al. (2010)

determined, in their small study using a convenience sample of eight solo mothers, that engaging in an education and support group environment assisted in raising self esteem and also improved other areas such as financial management and parenting. Further, Angleton argued if solo mothers' self esteem and confidence were bolstered, then the solo mothers would be more independent applying for jobs.

Lack of work related skills for employment is less likely to lead to well paid work choices. The full development of work related skills may be hindered for solo parents due to time press and the demands of being their child's sole carer (Brown & Joyce, 2007; Hodgson, Dienhart, & Daly, 2002). Bojer (2002) summarised the plight of mothers who choose to care for their children in the early years as being counter-productive in the paid workforce. Moreover, childcare is a devalued activity in terms of monetary payment as well as being a hindrance to developing and updating skills in the paid workforce (Bojer, 2002).

Although time press and caring responsibilities can impede skills development, other factors may also be involved. Hall, Bretherton, and Buchanan (2000) stated funded training opportunities can be scarce, with employers hiring workers already possessing the skills needed. Although training is accessible through funding to Job Service Australia Providers (agencies to assist individuals return to paid work), the main aim is to move people on welfare to paid work as quickly as possible (Guenther, Falk, & Arnott, 2008). Training is not a priority in the Welfare to Work reforms as the focus is on "work first" and outcomes of training programs are not evaluated as key performance indicators (Guenther et al., 2008). Nevertheless, some solo mothers do have an opportunity to undertake or complete tertiary education in order to obtain a qualification and develop work related skills for future employment if they are receiving welfare payments such as Parenting Payment (Cortis, Cowling, & Meagher, 2008). Some solo mothers may be disadvantaged by the welfare reforms introduced in 2006

due to a primary focus on paid work although the reforms heralded a variety of changes that have important ramifications for solo mothers in many areas including education, training, paid work and parenting. The following chapter will discuss changes to welfare over time with emphasis on recent welfare reforms and the impact this has had on solo mothers.

Chapter Four

Welfare Reform

The Australian Government encourages all able bodied individuals, including solo parents, to engage in the paid workforce. The welfare system has evolved during the last 60 years, however the changes heralded in the 2005 Federal Budget significantly altered the way in which solo parents would be assisted by the Federal Government. Changes to the welfare system in 2006 have fostered a culture of solo mothers engaging in the paid workforce once the youngest child has reached school age. This was a dramatic change, which precipitated an outcry from various welfare agencies, such as ACOSS, claiming that solo mothers would be disadvantaged further. Particular concerns were raised regarding new recipients who were on Newstart allowance rather than Parenting Payment and were receiving significantly less financial assistance. New compliance measures of suspending payment if mutual obligation duties, such as attending appointments, accepting jobs or applying for jobs were avoided, also caused concern that solo mothers would be penalised unjustly. However, safeguards have been established to ensure vulnerable people were not severely disadvantaged. This chapter will discuss the history of the Australian welfare system as it relates to solo parents and the changes affecting many solo parents with the changes introduced in 2006.

In 2003-4 approximately 61 percent of solo parents and their families received the bulk of their income from Government pensions and allowances (Lincare, 2007). However, in 2006 at least 52 percent of solo parent families, just under half of whom were headed by solo mothers, received some income from wages, salaries or from unincorporated businesses (Lincare, 2007). Nevertheless, the Federal Government has changed social security legislation on recent occasions in an attempt to increase labour force participation by solo parents and to change the focus of welfare assistance to assistance to obtain paid work.

History of Welfare for Solo Parents in Australia

When social security was first introduced to assist families in 1912, a maternity allowance was paid to families to prevent financial hardship (Herscovitch & Stanton, 2008). The allowance was available to all families to avoid any stigma that might be associated with charity. Through the depression years of the 1920s the payment was reduced but not withdrawn and from 1931 to 1943 the payment was subject to a means test. The payment persisted until 1978 when it was considered redundant because of other payments that could be claimed (Daniels, 2009).

Child endowment was introduced in 1941 for families with more than one child to assist with the costs of child rearing, however the payment was also used to justify lack of increases in wages. Families reliant upon income from the invalid pension or other benefits were also extended a child allowance from 1945 to assist with costs associated with raising children (Daniels, 2009). Child endowment was also extended to families with only one child in 1950 (Herscovitch & Stanton, 2008; McHugh & Millar, 1996).

In 1942, the widow's pension was introduced and available dependent on a means test. There were many widows eligible for the widow's pension, including those receiving a war pension. The widow's pension also catered for de facto widows,

deserted wives, divorced women, and women whose husbands were in mental institutions (Daniels, 2009; McHugh & Millar, 1996). Women who were unmarried mothers, women with husbands in prison, those whose de facto husbands had left them or those women who had left their husbands or agreed to separate were ineligible for the pension. The conditions for receiving the widow's pension were governed by the moral standards of the day and the perceived deservingness of the woman in question (Daniels, 2009).

When child endowment was introduced, tax concessions were abolished so that parents who were financially better off would not be gaining more assistance than those parents who were ineligible for tax concessions. However, the tax concessions were re-introduced and increased during the 1950s and 1960s while the child endowment affected by rising inflation, had lessened impact (Daniels, 2009). In the late 1960s, government under Prime Minister Gorton introduced assistance to solo mothers with children not covered by the widow's pension. This augmented the payments from the state governments for solo mothers. Interestingly, the number of solo parents rose appreciably from 124,000 in 1966 to 183,100 in 1974 (Daniels, 2009).

In the 1970s under the Fraser government, tax concessions were again abolished and family allowance was introduced to replace child endowment. The family allowance was a greater amount than child endowment and the revenue savings from the defunct tax concessions were used to bolster the family allowance amounts up to 300 percent more than the child endowment amounts (Daniels, 2009).

The Supporting Mothers Benefit was introduced by the Whitlam government in 1973 for solo mothers not adequately cared for under the existing benefits and was the same amount as other pensions. However, for a solo mother to be eligible, she had to have been separated for six months after separation or birth of child (McHugh & Millar, 1996). In 1980, the Fraser government granted immediate eligibility and also extended

the benefit to solo fathers renaming the benefit Supporting Parents Benefit and effectively ensuring welfare payments were available for all solo parents (Daniels, 2009).

Payments changed in the ensuing years with the introduction of a new payment in 1983 called the Family Income Supplement to help all families who were receiving low incomes. After the 1987 elections and the commitment that no Australian child would live in poverty by 1990, the Hawke and Keating governments undertook to increase rates of payment, introduce rent assistance to low income families and make the income means test more generous. Further, the Family Income Supplement was renamed the Family Allowance supplement (Daniels, 2009).

A review of the welfare system beginning in 1986 recommended greater focus upon paid work and social participation activities, particularly for disabled, solo parents and unemployed (Herscovitch & Stanton, 2008). The introduction of Jobs, Education and Training Scheme (JET) in 1989 was designed to assist solo parents to enter or re-enter the paid workforce (Cook, 2004). Women with children were more likely though to do paid work part time and training was often for work with limited opportunity, low pay, and little job security such as clerical, hospitality, retail or factory work (McHugh & Millar, 1996).

The Child Support Act was passed in 1988 so that both parents were obliged to provide care for the children after separation (Herscovitch & Stanton, 2008; McHugh & Millar, 1996). In 1989, the Widows Pension was incorporated into the Supporting Parents Benefit and the new benefit was renamed the Sole Parent Pension so that all solo parents whether widowed, divorced or single, were included under the one banner (Daniels, 2009).

The Parenting Allowance was introduced in 1995 to help with the costs of raising children especially in low income families. In 1998, the Parenting Allowance

and the Sole Parent Pension were combined to form Parenting Payment for people caring for children (Daniels, 2009). During the 1990s, Australia was in a recession with unemployment rates as high as 11 percent and the rate continued to rise even after recovery from the recession. At the end of the 1990s, following increased concern regarding the number of individuals dependent upon PPS and DSP, a review of welfare system was again undertaken by the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (Herscovitch & Stanton, 2008). In 2000 the RGWR submitted the final report and this provided the impetus for changes to the welfare system, particularly for solo parents, disabled people and unemployed in 2006.

During 2000, a range of payments, subsidies and tax concessions were replaced by three payments. These were the Family Tax Benefit (Part A and Part B) and the Child Care Benefit. These were designed to reduce financial stress for low and middle income families (Daniels, 2009). Prior to the changes in 2006, several alterations to welfare occurred. In order to increase social and paid work participation, from 2003 PPS recipients were required to participate in work activity, study or training once their youngest child reached high school age (Cook, 2004). Solo parents were also provided continued assistance with education through the Pensioner Education Supplement (PES) in addition to PPS. This strategy was to encourage return to the paid workforce (Daniels, 2009).

Throughout the decades of welfare in Australia, there have been many adjustments and changes (See Table 1 for a summary). It can be noted there has been more focus on equity and response to changing cultural norms, such as inclusion of solo mothers as eligible for welfare payments and in later years the inclusion of solo fathers. Changes from no participation requirements for some groups of welfare recipients (e.g. solo parents), to that of mutual obligation and compliance frameworks are a noticeable deviation from provision of “welfare” or social protection to active economic and social

participation (Knijn, Martin, & Millar, 2007). The most significant of such changes were those recommended by the RGWR chaired by Patrick McClure (RGWR, 2000).

Table 1.

Summary of Changes to Social Security in Australia

Year	Change to Social Security
1912	Social Security introduced – maternity allowance
1931-1943	Maternity allowance subject to means test
1941	Child Endowment for families with more than one child and tax concessions ceased.
1942	Widow's pension introduced for widows, de facto widows, deserted wives, divorced women and women whose husbands were in mental institutions
1950	Child Endowment for families with one child or more
1950s-1960s	Tax concessions re-introduced and increased
Late 1960s	Assistance for solo mothers not covered by widow's pension
1970s	Family allowance introduced to take place of Child Endowment and Tax concessions ceased again
1973	Introduction of supporting mother's benefit for solo mothers separated for 6 months.
1978	Maternity allowance discontinued
1980	Immediate eligibility for supporting mother's benefit and name changed to supporting parent's benefit to include fathers.
1983	Introduction of Family Income Supplement for families on low incomes
1986	Review of Social Security
1987	Introduction of rent assistance for low income families. Family Income Supplement renamed Family Allowance Supplement
1988	Child Support Act passed
1989	Introduction of Jobs, Education and Training Scheme (JET). Widow's Pension incorporated into Supporting Parents Benefit and renamed Sole Parent Pension.
1995	Parenting Allowance introduced to assist low income families.
1998	Parenting Allowance and Sole Parent Pension combined to form Parenting Payment
1999	Review of Social Security
2000	Family Tax Benefit (Part A & B) and Child Care Benefit replaced a series of subsidies and tax concessions. Reference Group on Welfare Reform report submitted.
2003	Solo parents required to participate in paid work related activities once youngest child entered high school
2006	Changes to participation requirements for solo parents, disabled people and jobseekers

Background of Current Welfare Support for Solo Parents in Australia

In 1999 the RGWR was commissioned to investigate possible ways to reform the welfare system in Australia (RGWR, 2000). An interim report was released in March 2000 outlining suggestions for a new framework for welfare support in Australia.

Feedback was sought from the Australian community at this time, including businesses, support agencies, community members and income recipients. The final report was submitted in July 2000 (RGWR, 2000).

According to the RGWR (2000) the origins of welfare has its roots in more economically sound times when there was greater employment and families comprised two parents and children rather than the increasing trend towards solo parenting. Indeed, the society that initiated the advent of welfare is very different from society of Australia today (Daniels, 2009). Henman (2002) also asserted the welfare system has not stayed the same throughout the years. Indeed, the changes have reflected changes in society such as acknowledgement that both men and women may be solo parents. Further, the changes became more equality driven in that solo parenthood was not distinguished by widowhood, unplanned pregnancy or divorce but rather as parenting without a partner (Daniels, 2009; Henman, 2002).

Reform of the welfare system was also indicated by the rising joblessness in Australia despite economic growth and the emergence of communities of welfare dependent people (RGWR, 2000). Of particular concern was the rising number of families without a parent in paid employment and the rising number of welfare recipients reliant on welfare payments for the majority of their income (RGWR, 2000). However, Henman (2002) suggested that part of the problem was the available number of jobs. Regardless, the imminent reforms were indicative of a change from a passive welfare system to an active system (Nelson, 2008).

As noted by the RGWR (2000) the balance between paid full time, part time and casual work had also changed with much of the casual and part time paid work being taken by families who already had employment. Further, solo parents in particular were more likely to prefer flexible paid work within school hours and/or at a time when

suitable child care is available (Millar & Ridge, 2008), thus providing greater demand for paid part time and casual work.

Current Welfare Support for Solo Parents

The current welfare support arrangements for solo parents have been broadly placed in two categories of new recipients and “grandfathered” recipients (solo parents on Parenting Payment prior to July 1, 2006). From July 1, 2006, new solo parent applicants for income support with the youngest child aged less than eight years of age, were able to access Parenting Payment Single (PPS). However, once the youngest child reached eight years of age, the solo parent transferred to Newstart Allowance (NSA). Further, if the youngest child reached six years of age, the solo parent would be obliged to seek paid work of at least 15 hours per week in order to receive PPS or NSA. If the new solo parent applicant had dependent children over the age of eight years, the solo parent would be eligible for NSA but not PPS (Finn & Gloster, 2008).

Solo parents who were already receiving PPS on July 1, 2006 would remain on PPS however, after July 1, 2007 were obliged to seek 15 hours part time paid work once their youngest child turned seven years of age. There was no transfer to NSA for this group of solo parents, provided the parent had not had a break in payments for more than 12 weeks (NCSMC, 2005).

A compliance measure of suspension of payments for up to eight weeks is in place to deter solo parents (and other job seekers) from persistently and deliberately avoiding mutual obligation duties (Centrelink, 2010a). The suspension of payments would occur after three separate failures to comply (ACOSS, 2010). Further, a measure of “No show, no pay” was introduced in 2009 to encourage participation. If a solo parent or other job seeker did not attend a prescribed activity, payment was suspended until they complied. ACOSS (2010) suggested the suspension of payments for up to eight weeks is unnecessarily harsh, given most Centrelink customers have difficulty

surviving from one payment to the next. Disney, Buduls, and Grant (2010) noted though, payments could be re-instated if the individual re-engaged as per requirements, thus encouraging participation in paid work related activities rather than punishment.

Solo parents were not considered to be a homogenous group and if the conditions were considered to be difficult to comply with, the solo parent could apply to Centrelink, the statutory agency dealing with welfare payments, to have the case reviewed by a case officer. Situations that could be considered would be domestic violence, foster carers, families with four or more children, as well as home or distance educators (Centrelink, 2010b). Considerations such as these are indicative of social justice values, although concerns still remain that solo parents as a group are susceptible to marginalisation and disadvantage. The following chapter will explore social justice values and issues pertaining to solo parents with an emphasis on issues surrounding the Welfare to Work reforms.

Chapter Five

Social Justice

The changes in the welfare system introduced in 2006 raised questions of social justice. Differences between conditions for solo parents who were already in receipt of Parenting Payment and those solo parents who applied for welfare support after July 1, 2006 were substantial. Parents receiving Parenting Payment prior to July 1, 2006 were required to look for paid work once the youngest child turned seven, however they were able to remain on Parenting Payment. New recipients of Parenting Payment after July 1, 2006 were expected to seek paid part time work if the youngest child was aged six years or older. Once the youngest child reached eight years of age, the solo parent would transfer to the lower payment of Newstart allowance, a payment ostensibly for job seekers. Further, the changes had been touted to be fairer in that there was a reciprocal obligation between the individual, community and government with greater opportunities. A detailed examination of the tenets of social justice including the concept of belief in a just world and issues of distributive fairness and procedural fairness are highlighted within this chapter, followed by a discussion of social justice in relation to the 2006 welfare reforms.

Solo parent families are among the most disadvantaged groups in Australia, have one of the lowest standards of living and are over-represented in lower socioeconomic areas (Saunders, Hill, & Bradbury, 2008). Solo parent families are also frequently the most affected by legislative changes that involve financial impacts and access to health services. Further, solo parents are less likely to own their own home (46%) as opposed to couple parents who are buying their own home (63%) (Lincare, 2007). While these facts are true for solo father and solo mother families, solo mother families are at even greater risk of being in a low income household, are more reliant on welfare, and have less disposable income. It is differences such as these that lead to concerns of social justice for the significant numbers of solo mother families.

Definition of Social Justice

Social justice is a term for which it is difficult to establish a definitive explanation. For example, justice may be seen as upholding of rights and general entitlement of individuals to have freedom of speech and equality within the law, or a social contract between the governors and those that are governed (Campbell, 2001). However, another definition is that justice is what people deserve whether that outcome is favourable or not, otherwise known as belief in a just world (Appelbaum, Lennon, & Aber, 2003; Campbell, 2001).

The definition of social justice remains nebulous (Drew, Bishop, & Syme, 2002). In fact, the concept of justice itself may depend on how the meaning is constructed within different communities (Drew et al., 2002). For example, justice may be constructed differently by indigenous people compared to non-indigenous people for offences committed against another person (Marchetti & Daly, 2007). Further, there may be perceptions by members of each community that one example of justice is less fair than the other (Marchetti & Daly, 2007). Similarly, distribution of goods and

resources may be perceived as fair by some and unfair by others depending on the culture and norms of the community.

Decision making procedures are also subject to similar variations. For example, individuals under autocratic rule are more likely to perceive less procedural fairness than those under democratic rule (Van Vugt, Jepson, Hart, & De Cremer, 2004). Further, the degree of trust in decision makers also affects perceptions of fairness (De Cremer & Tyler, 2007).

The many different manifestations and social constructions of justice and fairness ensure that there are varying operational definitions for social justice depending on the event, culture and community under study. Although for many, social justice means equity and fairness, it is a perception rather than a precise, empirically determined construct (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002).

Belief in a Just World

Underlying justice and fairness is belief in a just world. Bè nabou and Tirole (2005) explained belief in a just world is that people get what they deserve in life and deserve what they receive or “deservingness”. Further, Lipkus, Dalbert, and Siegler (1996) asserted belief in a just world contributed to subjective wellbeing and was likely to result in less incidence of depression and stress. However, belief in an unjust world is likely to forecast depression, stress and dissatisfaction with life. Dalbert, Lipkus, Sallay, and Goch (2001) stated behaviours were influenced according to which belief individuals held. For example, Dalbert et al. (2001) suggested belief in a just world fostered trust in society and fair treatment, whereas belief in an unjust world was more likely to result in dissatisfaction, distrust and behaviours that were more self-serving and unmindful of obligations, thus engendering a culture of unfairness. Furnham (1995) also established individuals with a strong belief in a just world had a well developed

internal locus of control whereas individuals with a belief in an unjust world were more likely to have an external locus of control.

By contrast, Appelbaum and colleagues (2003) found a strong belief in a just world could potentially disadvantage individuals who were already attempting to improve their situation but were unsuccessful. Appelbaum et al. (2003) suggested the lack of progress is more likely to be perceived by others as the fault of the “victim” so that the belief in a just world would not be challenged. Conversely however, for those who did not have a strong belief in a just world, there was less judgement of non-deservingness.

The dilemma with socially constructed meanings of social justice and belief in a just world is that many public policies and reforms are influenced greatly by perceived deservingness of targeted populations (Barrilleaux & Bernick, 2003). For example, a solo mother without resources may be perceived to deserve whatever treatment she receives (Schooneveldt, 2004) such as social exclusion, living with financial stress and facing discrimination. However, if the belief in a just world is not strongly developed, the opposite may be perceived.

Deservingness and belief in a just world are concepts that are based on subjective realities. Rescher (2002) maintained distribution of goods and resources should be allocated in an objective manner in order to be ethical and strictly fair, thus circumventing issues surrounding deservingness. Although Rescher noted entitlement appears similar to deservingness, entitlement is set by rules and guidelines whereas deservingness is value driven, and as such is subjective.

Two constructs that are frequently discussed as being integral to social justice are distributive fairness and procedural fairness. Distributive fairness is concerned with the equitable and fair distribution of goods and resources, while procedural fairness relates to voice and consultation, particularly in decision making (Cohn, White, &

Sanders, 2000). In the context of welfare reform, distributive fairness relates to payments for welfare recipients, compliance regimes, and distribution of other resources.

Distributive Fairness

The concept of social justice and particularly, distributive fairness, originated from the theory of social exchange, which is embedded within equity theory (Tyler, 1994). According to Tyler, individuals expect to gain their resources in a fair and equitable way and at the same time expect others to gain resources similarly. Also, individuals assess relationships with others by considering the ratio of inputs and outputs involved with the relationship (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). If the ratio is unequal, then the relationship is perceived to be inequitable (Huseman, et al., 1987). Justice within this context then, implies fairness and equality (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2005). Justice may also imply that the obligation placed on solo mothers to work for their income in the paid workforce may be perceived as just and fair (Saunders, 2000). However, such a perception also implies that individuals have the same perception of what equity entails (Huseman et al., 1987).

Regardless, distributive fairness is reliant upon the distribution of goods and resources or outcomes (De Cremer, 2002). These outcomes are measured by economic or resource gains, such as amount of income received. Distributive fairness is often closely linked with the equity rule (Brotheridge, 2003). The equity rule posits that distribution of goods and resources is an outcome derived from merit, so is a direct ratio of input and outputs. This rule then, ensures that the more input or effort, the greater output or reward for effort (Leventhal, 1977). Thus, the RGWR (2000) suggested there should be mutual obligation for welfare recipients if the individual is able to participate in paid work or work related activities in return for welfare payments.

Leventhal (1977) asserted the equity rule is too narrow in determining distributive fairness, and a combination of a needs rule and equality rule would be fairer. For example, a needs rule would ensure individuals, regardless of input, would be allocated goods and resources as needed. An equality rule would ensure that people receive similar goods and resources regardless of input or needs (Leventhal, 1977). Both needs and equality rules have potential problems of course.

A needs rule would ensure that individuals would have adequate goods and resources, however determining need would require having a set of guidelines that still may exclude others. The basis or legitimacy of the need would have to be considered. For example, if the need was self-propagated (such as leaving a marriage) and no attempt to remedy an adverse situation was made (such as not attempting to provide an income for the family), perhaps the need would be perceived as less legitimate than others (Hamilton, 2006).

Equality rules however, are more in line with provision of similar levels of goods and resources for everyone regardless of situation. This may provide disincentives for contributing more to society and creating wealth. While both the needs rule and the equality rule have useful applications, on their own they leave much to be desired in terms of perceived fairness. Moreover, belief in a just world complicates the rules further as depending on the strength of the belief, a person may be perceived as having a greater need.

Most people however, do use a combination of the different rules of distributive fairness when making a judgement. Depending on the context, more emphasis may be placed on particular rules for different circumstances. As a result, the perception of what is fair in terms of outcomes is not a fixed perception but rather, is fluid and dependent on the context (Leventhal, 1977). When considering solo mothers, for example, it is possible that fair outcomes may differ between two solo mothers depending on other

circumstances, needs and existing resources. Thus, the equity rule remains a heavily weighted component when determining distributive fairness (Brotheridge, 2003).

Distributive fairness can be explained as being just, fair or equitable depending on an individual's way of measuring the objective and ethical distribution of resources. Further, the allocation of resources can be described as maximal, optimal, popular, envy-free and negotiative (Rescher, 2002). Although ideally objective and ethical, not all parties are necessarily satisfied with distributions. For example, changes to welfare conditions for solo mothers may be seen by others in the community as a just distribution, which is democratically popular. Yet, solo mothers may consider the changes are unfair and prescriptive. For more details of objective and ethical distributions, refer to Table 2.

Table 2.

Explanations of Distributive Fairness. Adapted from “*Fairness: Theory and practice of distributive justice*” by N. Rescher, 2002. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

A DISTRIBUTION IS:	IF EVERYONE INVOLVED GETS A SHARE OF THE GOOD/BAD BEING DISTRIBUTED THAT IS:
(perfectly)Just	Exactly what meets their (legitimate) claims
Fair	Proportionate to their claims
Supra-fair	Sometimes more but never less than their fair share
Subjectively equitable	Of a self-appraised (subjective) value that is claim-proportionate
A DISTRIBUTION IS:	IF IT IS:
Maximal	So adjusted that the overall distribution is maximised
Benevolently optimal	Both subjectively equitable and maximal
Universally popular	Preferred to the alternatives by all parties involved
Democratically popular	Preferred by the greatest achievable majority of the parties involved
Envy-free	Such that no recipient would prefer someone else's share to his own
Negotiative	Such that this distribution would emerge from a negotiation that reflects the preferences (subjective valuations) and the power position of the parties concerned.

Distributive fairness is an important part of social justice, however increasingly so, procedural fairness is perceived by many as being a key component by which social justice is determined (Hamilton, 2006). While the majority of people want a fair distribution of goods and resources, it is apparent that having a voice and being part of the decision making processes that affect outcomes is just as important.

Procedural Fairness

Involvement in decision making is an important part of procedural fairness. However, the transparency of decision making and perceived fairness of the processes are also important. Another important factor of procedural fairness is trust in the decision makers (Helliwell & Wang, 2009; van de Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998). If there is no information on level of trustworthiness of decision makers, then it is imperative that fair procedures be used in order for outcomes to be favourably received. The more trust there is in decision makers, the more likely there is to be satisfaction with outcomes regardless of transparency of procedures used (De Cremer & Tyler, 2007). Further, there is more likely to be cooperation regarding any decisions made (De Cremer & Tyler, 2007).

Regardless of the amount of trust in decision makers, some studies have indicated procedural fairness to be predictive of positive reactions to distribution of goods and resources (see Brotheridge, 2003; Hamilton, 2006). For example, Hamilton (2006) illustrated in her study of allocating money equally or unequally, the distribution was influenced by the ability to explain the actions. If there was no opportunity to explain actions, the allocation was more equal. Interestingly, Hamilton's study also revealed transparency to be an important factor in procedural fairness by mediating the negative effects of unequal allocations, however, did not necessarily make much difference to fairness of allocations.

Having a voice or perceiving having a voice helps to ensure acceptance and positive reactions to decisions made. Having some say or voice on a matter, whether it has great influence or not on the outcome, leads to a higher degree of perceived procedural fairness (Lind & Tyler, 1988). However, Avery and Quiñones (2002) argued that this explanation is an oversimplification of voice and the role voice plays in procedural fairness. Indeed, Avery and Quiñones asserted that it is perceived voice opportunity, giving voice and instrumentality (i.e. effect) as well as actual voice opportunity that have a great effect on perceived procedural fairness. Tyler (1994) stated voice opportunity was sufficient to assess a procedure as fair. However, Avery and Quiñones disputed Tyler's conclusion and argued if an individual was allowed to have a voice but a negative effect resulted, the level of trust was likely to be diminished. As a result, it is unlikely that procedural fairness will be perceived (De Cremer & Tyler, 2007). The higher the level of trust, the more likely it is that there will be cooperation between parties involved.

Although procedural fairness is often discussed as separate from distributive fairness, the two are closely related (Cohn, White, & Sanders, 2000). Brockner (2002) asserted a high degree of procedural fairness and trust results in more satisfaction with outcomes or distributive fairness. By contrast, lower degrees of procedural fairness and distrust may result in dissatisfaction and less support for outcomes. This is an important consideration in light of welfare reforms for solo mothers. Assuming Brockner's assertions are valid, comprehensive consultation with solo mothers regarding proposed legislative changes and transparent decision making processes are likely to engender greater trust in policy makers. Establishing trust is also more likely to lead to greater compliance and acceptance of changes to welfare conditions.

Social Justice, Fairness and Welfare Reform for Solo Mothers

Solo parents were one of the targeted groups, along with unemployed and disabled people, for the Welfare to Work reforms introduced in 2006 (ACOSS, 2010). A significant argument for the case of welfare reform was the increase of poorer communities (RGWR, 2000). A greater prevalence of poorer communities correlated with associated disadvantage in the form of poorer services and infrastructure with entrenchment of unemployment despite economic growth overall within Australia (RGWR, 2000). However, the changes made to the welfare system appear to perpetuate this in part through the loss of actual take home income as child care and transport costs are met in order to comply with conditions to receive welfare payments (ACOSS, 2005), thus violating needs rule based distributive fairness.

A mutual obligation framework was proposed for welfare by the RGWR (2000). Benefits for both individuals and corporations were cited in the report with a reciprocal obligation between individual, community and government leading to greater opportunities for paid work, training and social partnerships (RGWR, 2000). While the aim may have been to develop genuine partnerships, Henman (2002) suggested that the onus is on the solo parent to fulfil prescribed obligations. There is an expectation that income support recipients will comply with income support conditions but there appears to be no compliance measures for businesses to meet their obligations to provide equitable paid work arrangements for their employees (Cook, 2004). Indeed, mutual obligation in Australia implies a welfare recipient must deserve to receive income support (Schooneveldt, 2004).

The mutual obligation framework is unequal in terms of enforceable requirements. However, it can be argued the system has merit in terms of equity, as lack of compliance and effort by jobseekers to look for paid work have punitive

consequences. ACOSS (2005) stresses though, penalties of non-payment may be too harsh for vulnerable groups such as solo parents.

Other changes as part of the Welfare to Work reform affect tertiary study opportunities and raise distributive fairness issues. Solo parents on PPS may commence approved full time study, which would fulfil participation requirements. Further, PES is also available as a fortnightly payment to assist with costs associated with study. PES will be continued if the solo parent then transfers to NSA, once the youngest child turns eight years and the solo parent will also be permitted to complete the course. However, the same opportunities do not apply for the solo parent already on NSA unless prepared to fulfil the participation requirements of job search or part time paid work as well. The options of transferring to Youth Allowance, Austudy or Abstudy are available but no other assistance such as PES is offered (Centrelink, 2010a). However, a training supplement may be available for solo parents to assist with costs of an approved training course (Centrelink, 2010a). The difference in eligibility for solo parents to obtain education assistance appears to be unequal and discriminatory. Further, the absence of education assistance for solo parents already on NSA, limits the opportunities to improve chances of stable and better paid employment. This is somewhat puzzling given the findings from RGWR (2000) indicating a significant shortage in skilled workers and a decline in less skilled paid work.

In addition to the discrepancies between education assistance for solo mothers on NSA and PPS, there is also a substantial difference between the payments received even though costs for maintaining the family are likely to be similar. See Table 3 for comparisons of benefits for solo parents on PPS and NSA.

Table 3.

Comparisons between Parenting Payment Single (PPS) and Newstart (NSA) for solo parent headed families.

	PPS pre 07/06	PPS post 07/06	NSA
Fortnightly Maximum Payment	\$625.90	\$625.90	\$513.80
Fortnightly income allowed before tapering of payment	\$170.60 (tapering of PPS of 40 cents per dollar earned)	\$170.60 (tapering of PPS of 40 cents per dollar earned)	\$62.00 (tapering of NSA of 50 cents per dollar earned)
Eligibility	Dependent child/ren under age of 16yrs	Dependent child/ren under age of 8yrs	Dependent child/ren over age of 8yrs
Other concessions; payments etc	Pension Concession card; Family Tax Benefit A & B; child care payments; carer allowance for parents of disabled children; pharmaceutical benefits allowance; rent assistance	Pension Concession card; Family Tax Benefit A & B; child care payments; carer allowance for parents of disabled children; pharmaceutical benefits allowance; rent assistance	Pension Concession card; Family Tax Benefit A & B; child care payments; carer allowance for parents of disabled children; pharmaceutical benefits allowance; rent assistance
Participation requirements	Engage in part time paid work for 15 hrs per week once youngest child is 7yrs	Engage in part time paid work for 15 hrs per week once youngest child is 6yrs	Engage in part time paid work for 15 hrs per week.
Tertiary Study	Can undertake full time approved study Short term training can be undertaken	Can undertake full time approved study Short term training can be undertaken	Can complete full time approved study but not commence. Short term training can be undertaken

Although the RGWR included service providers, academics and social policy specialists, end users of social security services were not included in the Reference Group to assist in formulation of appropriate strategies (Curtain, 2000). Although RGWR (2000) indicated some welfare recipients were included in focus group

discussions as part of the consultation process, actual numbers were noticeably absent. The scarcity of information regarding consultation with individuals potentially directly affected by reforms, indicates some lack of procedural fairness. Indeed, Curtain (2000) stressed the importance of including “ordinary” citizens in consultation procedures.

Rationale for the Current Study

Solo parents and solo mothers in particular, are a socially and economically vulnerable group. An abundance of research has acknowledged many of the difficulties solo mothers experience (e.g. Butterworth, 2003; Butterworth et al., 2006; Carney, 2008; Crosier et al., 2007; Hughes & Hand, 2005; Loxton et al., 2006; Webber & Boromeo, 2005). Significant changes to the welfare system raised concerns for some social agencies and lobby groups such as ACOSS and NCSMC regarding fair treatment and potential decline in already limited resources for solo mothers.

The major change involving transfer to NSA for some solo parents is of particular concern as it involves a decrease in payment of an already “just adequate” payment. This could possibly have drastic consequences for solo mothers who do not receive financial assistance from any other source. Similarly, the requirement of mutual obligation with solo parents expected to participate in “approved” activities once the youngest child reached six years of age raises issues surrounding parenting, working for pay and child care. Other concerns are the effects of perceptions of distributive and procedural fairness. Solo parents as a group do not seem to be particularly politically active apart from the lobby group of NCSMC and this is a concern in terms of legislative changes that have potentially significant effects. Thus, subjective wellbeing is an area of interest further emphasised in light of the 2006 Welfare to Work reforms.

Many researchers (e.g. Butterworth, 2003; Loxton et al., 2006; Papadakis et al., 2008) have determined solo mothers are more prone to mental health issues and lower standards of living overall, as well as more likely to be socially excluded. These factors

have been identified by researchers such as de Vaus, Gray, Qu, and Stanton (2009) and Stewart et al. (2008) as influencing low levels of subjective wellbeing.

Certainly, solo mothers as a group, are likely to have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing when compared to other population groups. This has been demonstrated through numerous surveys undertaken by the Australian Centre for Quality of Life (see Cummins, 2005; Cummins et al., 2008). Although data did not distinguish between solo mothers and solo fathers, Cummins et al. (2008) were able to establish solo parents had a diverse range of wellbeing. However, the mean wellbeing as measured on the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) was demonstrated to be lower for solo parents ($M=70.19$, $SD = 14.53$) than for partnered parents ($M=76.70$, $SD = 10.95$).

The RGWR (2000) suggested paid work is an important factor in promoting social participation, which in turn can help prevent an increase in physical and mental health problems. Further, the RGWR, indicated paid work was likely to lead to enhanced self esteem, as well as raising the overall standard of living. However, given the diverse circumstances of solo mothers, it is imprudent to expect the same results for all solo mothers. Indeed there is conflicting findings regarding paid work and subjective wellbeing. For example, Cummins et al. (2008) identified that paid work does not necessarily lead to higher levels of wellbeing for solo parents and even for full time employed solo parents with a good income, the level of wellbeing is much lower than for their partnered counterparts. However, Cummins (2008) identified higher levels of subjective wellbeing overall for individuals who are in the paid workforce compared to those individuals unemployed or looking for paid work. Moreover, Cummins (2000) suggested high self esteem was more likely to lead to higher levels of subjective wellbeing and it may be possible self esteem would increase with employment if the work is satisfying. As such, the rationalisation identified by the RGWR (2000) that paid

work is socially and personally beneficial, may indeed indicate a rise in subjective wellbeing for solo parents.

The factors involved with solo mothers' subjective wellbeing appear to be complex. Apart from unemployment as a factor explaining lower levels of wellbeing for solo mothers, measureable variables such as educational attainment, income, and residential status may also influence subjective wellbeing. To examine subjective wellbeing in the social climate, especially relating to Welfare to Work reforms, a two part study was designed. In the first part, the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers was measured quantitatively using the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and compared with normative population data (Cummins et al., 2003). The second part of the study followed on with qualitative interviews with a selection of solo mothers who had completed the PWI. The qualitative part of the study was used to expand, clarify and add value to the quantitative aspect.

Two general hypotheses formulated in regard to the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers were:

1. Solo mothers will have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing as measured by scores on the PWI compared to the normative population.
2. Solo mothers who are in the paid workforce will have significantly higher levels of subjective wellbeing as measured by scores on the PWI compared to solo mothers who are not in the paid workforce.

The following chapter will examine the methodology for the current study and provide justification for the approach and methods used.

Chapter Six

Methodology

This chapter explains and justify the methodology used in the current study. The methodology used to research the construction of wellbeing for solo mothers comprised an epistemology of social constructionism with a theoretical perspective of feminist theory. The form of enquiry used was feminist enquiry and the method used in the current study was sequential transformative mixed methods with a qualitative priority – follow up strategy utilised. This methodology served to elicit a more complete understanding of construction of wellbeing as objective facts were examined and then expanded using follow up qualitative investigation. Further, this methodology is well suited to social change research.

Research Design

The purpose of the study was to investigate how solo mothers construct subjective wellbeing in relation to work and welfare; and also to explore solo mothers' perceptions of work and welfare in light of Welfare to Work reforms. To fulfil the purpose of this study the research was designed with an epistemology of social construction from a feminist perspective and feminist form of enquiry using mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods. See Figure 2 for a flowchart of the methodology for the current study.

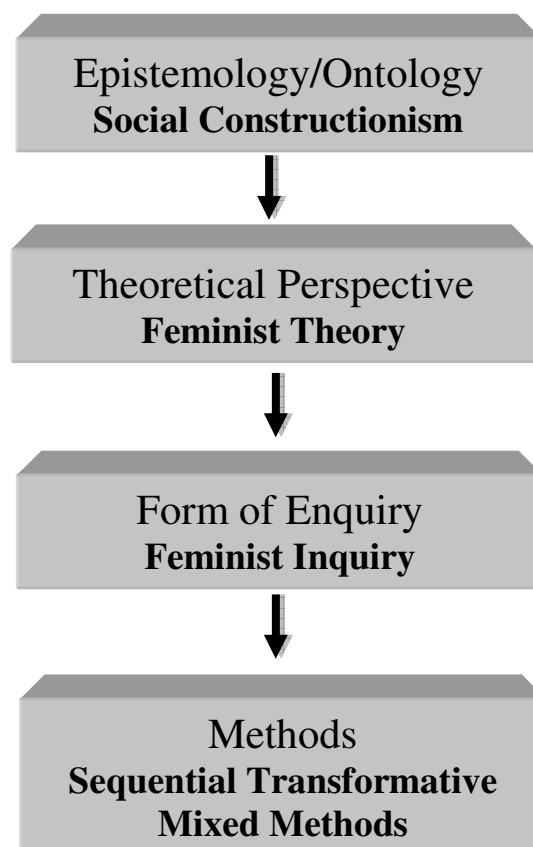


Figure 2. *Methodology Flowchart from Epistemology through to Methods*

Social Constructionism

According to Hruby (2001), social constructionism has evolved as a way in which to understand the world, proposing that knowledge is not discovered so much as constructed. Although the history behind the emergence of social constructionism is quite complex, Hruby (2001) suggests the evolution of social constructionism can be broken down into three waves. Hruby (2001) described the first wave as a development of the “sociology of knowledge”. The sociology of knowledge challenged the premise of irrefutable scientific fact within one paradigm to be replaced by facts in a different paradigm. Constructionist thinking can be located within the writings of Emile Durkheim and philosopher Thomas Kuhn and social scientists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann who were prominent during the first wave of social constructionism (Hruby, 2001). Indeed, it was Berger and Luckmann’s book title *The Social Construction of Reality* that renamed the sociology of knowledge to social constructionism (Collin, 1997). However, Berger and Luckmann did not seek to elevate social constructionism to an epistemology but rather to clarify what was meant by the sociology of knowledge. Nevertheless, as Berger and Luckmann’s work has been studied, the meanings within it have been reconstructed according to contexts in which it has been studied (Hruby, 2001).

In the second wave of postmodern social constructionism, Gergen (1985) further explained the underpinning themes of understanding through different contexts and interactions. Gergen (1995, p. 18) also suggested that social constructionism “is not so much a foundational theory of knowledge as an anti-foundational dialogue” alluding to the controversy of subjective realities as being just as salient as empirical facts.

Hruby’s (2001) third wave of social constructionism is still evolving and appears to be a reappraisal of the tenets described and movement towards a new realism. An explanation of the new realism appears to be based in a belief that there is a consistent

reality that is present prior to attachment of meanings; that is, there is a biological and ecological basis for experiences that is unlikely to change, to which we attach meanings. While it could be argued that this new realism is not congruent with social constructionism, Hruby (2001) explained that the third wave may indeed be a different type of knowledge that will lead to a new way of understanding the world.

For the purposes of the current study, the more conventional views of social constructionism such as Gergen (1985), Crotty (2003) and Daly (2007) have described, were utilised. Social constructionism is an orientation concerned with the way in which individuals construe or understand the world (Gergen, 1985). According to Daly (2007) social constructionism is perception of an object or event and the subjective meaning of those that is made within a social context. The way meaning is made is through a combination of internally driven processes (e.g. cognition) and externally driven processes (e.g. social norms). Although this may appear to suggest meaning is constructed in a sequential way for events and objects in the world, it is rather that individuals construct meanings more globally and may perceive events and objects through a cultural lens as well as through the lenses of those closest to individuals in early formative years (Crotty, 2003). The meanings are made to represent the reality as it is for the individual and as such, two or more individuals may have just as many different constructed realities for the same event (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Further, according to Zuriff (1998), all knowledge that an individual possesses is constructed rather than discovered or innate and the constructed knowledge is maintained and reproduced through the social milieu.

Crotty (2003) suggested that the researcher's mind be open to interpretations that might not fit with constructed meanings and personal experiences of the researcher. However, a social constructionist epistemology recognises that often meanings are co-constructed through both the meanings that are attached to experiences by the

participants and also the interpretations and methods used by the researcher (Charmaz, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Indeed, it is possible that the researcher may be influenced by perceptions of the participants just as participants can be open to influence by the researcher's constructions of realities (Crotty, 2003).

Feminist Perspective and Enquiry

A feminist perspective and feminist form of enquiry were chosen in the current study as solo mothers were perceived to be marginalised as a group. The feminist approach is concerned with imbalances of power within society and promotes social change (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Weedon, 1997). Feminist research emerged as a result of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period there was increased awareness of the contradictory nature of research and the actual experiences of women in society (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). As Naomi Weisstein (1994) stated, historically women have been attributed with characteristics for which there was no scientific corroboration, but rather a series of assumptions made by men in male orientated disciplines. However, since the feminist movement has highlighted gender equalities, research methodologies have developed to include feminist perspectives to ensure the voices of women are heard (Wylie, 1994) and research is more inclusive of marginalised groups.

Oakley (1998) suggested that research methods used in the 1960s were in fact gendered, with quantitative methods considered to be "male" research methods and qualitative inquiry to be "female" methods. Thus, for some time, quantitative methods were scorned by feminist researchers. However, Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) assert that there are a number of positivist feminist researchers who prefer objective methods. Traditionally, positivist research has been male oriented and all knowledge gained was inferred to the general population (Leckenby, 2007). Positivist feminist researchers are concerned with including women and other marginalised groups in research rather than

extrapolating results of androcentric research. This then, ensures women's experiences and attributes are given equal importance to those of men (Leckenby, 2007).

However, an important point made by Gray, Williamson, Karp, and Dalphin (2007) is that feminist research makes use of many different approaches, including quantitative methods; however, qualitative methods that utilise women's voices such as interviews are most often associated with feminist research (Leckenby & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Indeed, Krook and Squires (2006, p. 44) suggest "there is no distinctive feminist methodology, but there is a distinctive feminist approach to methodology and methods".

Feminist research perspectives emerged from dissatisfaction with patriarchal based research that claimed to speak for all people and extend the experiences of men to women, thus distorting or failing to include the experiences of women (Gray, et al., 2007; Stanley & Wise, 1983). Kralik (2005, p. 251) stated feminism is "about valuing women, their ideas, ideals and experiences and facilitating women towards taking meaningful action in their lives".

However, it is important to note that there is a great diversity among women and women are not an homogenous group (Kralik, 2005). Similarly, solo mothers are a heterogeneous group and the experiences and values of solo mothers that accompany different realities and identities are just as diverse. Even so, research from a feminist perspective is particularly suitable for solo mothers, considering that as a group, solo mothers are cited as being vulnerable in terms of financial stress (Baker, 2008; Stewart, Reutter, Makwarimba, et al., 2008), social exclusion (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards, 2008) and other severe disadvantages (Butterworth, 2003).

According to Grossman, Gilbert, Genero, et al. (1997, p.76) "feminist research is purposeful" with a goal by feminist psychology researchers to enable women to have a voice about matters that concern them, in particular events and circumstances that may result in marginalisation and stigma. The role of the researcher in the current study was

to provide the solo mothers with a voice to share perceptions and experiences with others (particularly those in powerful positions) so that understanding the needs of solo mothers could be achieved.

Research from a feminist perspective can be transformative. For example, it can inform and educate about what it is like to be a solo mother, raising the consciousness of those who are in powerful positions, as well as providing some insight for the solo mothers themselves regarding different perspectives, choices, and opportunities. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007, p. 4) assert that “feminist research goals foster empowerment and emancipation for women and other marginalised groups”.

Mixed Methods

The current study employed a mixed methods design using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. By using mixed methods, it was possible to make direct comparison of different groups (through quantitative methods) as well as context and perception rich data (through qualitative methods). Although Denzin, Lincoln, and Giardina (2006) asserted that mixed methods research is an extension of classical experimentation, Jick (1979) asserted that mixed methods is used primarily as a way to reinforce or confirm the findings of quantitative research through qualitative findings and vice versa. However, the design was considered to be complementary to assist in gathering a more comprehensive picture (Morgan, 1998; Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002) rather than a solely confirmatory process.

Howe (2004) stated that mixed methods designs in the experimental tradition give priority to quantitative data and that qualitative data are given much lower priority in terms of importance of data collected. However, Howe (2004) suggested that mixed methods designs can originate from an interpretivist epistemology thus ensuring qualitative data are prioritised. Morgan (1998) simplified the use of mixed methods and described four different strategies in what he called a Priority-Sequence Model that

refutes claims of qualitative data always being secondary to quantitative data. (See Table 4). In the current study, consideration was given to the strategy that would be most relevant. Although the quantitative component was completed first, the qualitative data were given priority to provide optimal value to the voices of the solo mothers interviewed for the current study and thus a Qualitative Priority – follow up strategy was used (Morgan, 1998).

Table 4.

Combining Qualitative and Quantitative methods

Strategy	Description
Qualitative Priority – preliminary	The Qualitative component of the study is completed first and given priority.
Qualitative Priority – follow up	The Qualitative component is completed after the Quantitative component and is given priority.
Quantitative Priority – preliminary	The Quantitative component of the study is completed first and given priority.
Quantitative Priority – follow up	The Quantitative component is completed after the Qualitative component and is given priority.

Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, and Creswell, (2005) also described different strategies that were situated as either sequential designs or concurrent designs. Similar to Morgan (1998), Hanson et al. (2005) described the sequential designs as having unequal priorities. In concurrent designs, priority can be either equal to both methods or unequal. A description of each of the mixed methods designs is provided in Table 5.

Table 5.

Mixed Methods Designs

Design	Description
Sequential explanatory	Priority given to quantitative data and qualitative data used to explain or augment quantitative data.
Sequential exploratory	Priority given to qualitative data and quantitative data used to augment qualitative data
Sequential transformative	Uses an explicit advocacy lens such as feminist perspective. Priority can be given to either data and can be used to give “voice” to the research participants.
Concurrent triangulation	Qualitative and quantitative data collected and analysed at same time. Priority equal. Confirmatory.
Concurrent nested	Qualitative and quantitative data collected and analysed at same time. Priority unequal. The nested data is given less priority.
Concurrent transformative	Uses an explicit advocacy lens such as feminist perspective. Qualitative and quantitative data collected and analysed at same time. Priority can be equal or unequal. Can be used to give “voice” to the participants and foster understanding.

Given that the aim of the current study was to allow solo mothers to have a voice about experiences in regards to wellbeing, work, Welfare to Work reforms and social justice, a sequential transformative mixed methods design was used (Hanson et al., 2005). Quantitative data were collected in the first part to gain a picture of quantifiable measures of wellbeing among solo mothers. While there were some qualitative questions attached to the quantitative measure, these were used mainly as an overall impression of perceived effects of Welfare to Work reforms. Priority was given to the qualitative data in the second part comprising in-depth interviews, to enable the solo mothers to have a voice about experiences and perceptions. Using a sequential transformative design (Creswell, 2003; Hanson et al., 2005) enabled the researcher to gather a more complete picture rather than a potentially one-sided exploration of solo mothers’ wellbeing.

In the current study, the quantitative component was used to determine the degree of solo mothers’ wellbeing in relation to normative wellbeing data, where the

qualitative component was utilised as a means to gather information regarding the underlying construction of wellbeing. In essence, quantitative findings provided facts that had one reality and gave “hard” information about the phenomenon of quantifiable subjective wellbeing. The quantitative results provided information regarding differences between solo mothers and the normative population, as well as differences between solo mothers who were in the paid workforce and those who were not in paid employment. The qualitative findings provided in-depth information about the way wellbeing was constructed and the meanings attached to salient events. As such, this research is significant to policy formation and ways of working with solo mother populations. The quantitative data was the preliminary data obtained. This part of the current study will be presented first in the following chapter.

Chapter Seven

Part One - Quantitative Study

This chapter examines the quantitative aspect of the current study, comprising method, results and discussion. The quantitative part of the current study was designed to investigate the two hypotheses related to lower levels of subjective wellbeing for solo mothers compared to the normative population and higher levels of subjective wellbeing for solo mothers who are in the paid workforce compared to solo mothers who are not in paid employment. While it was confirmed solo mothers have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing than the normative population, there was no appreciable differences in subjective wellbeing for the participants in the current study when paid employment was entered as an independent variable. However, results did suggest income was an important factor influencing subjective wellbeing.

Method

Hypotheses

Previous research (e.g. Butterworth, 2003; Loxton et al., 2006; Papadakis et al., 2008) has indicated solo mothers are more likely to have mental health problems, lower standards of living and be socially excluded, thus potentially influencing levels of subjective wellbeing. However, according to the RGWR (2000), it is likely that engaging in the paid workforce will increase self esteem and standard of living will be higher. Nevertheless, Cummins (2008) noted the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers in the paid workforce did not significantly increase to a similar level experienced by couple mothers. In order to investigate subjective wellbeing quantitatively, two broad hypotheses were generated:

1. Solo mothers will have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing as measured by scores on the PWI compared to the normative population.
2. Solo mothers who are in the paid workforce will have significantly higher levels of subjective wellbeing as measured by scores on the PWI compared to solo mothers who are not in the paid workforce.

Participants

Participants for the project were recruited between 2005 and 2006. The participants were a self selecting purposive sample of 73 Australian solo mothers. Requests for surveys numbered 98, and 73 (71.5%) completed surveys were returned. The solo mothers who took part in the current study were identified to have their youngest child aged between six and ten years. Solo mothers with children in this age bracket were considered to be potentially most affected by the Welfare to Work policy (Commonwealth of Australia, Attorney-General's Department, 2005) as solo mothers with youngest child aged six would be required to seek paid work of at least 15 hours

per week from July 2006 and care would need to be considered in most cases, especially for children who are still in primary school. Solo mothers who were in the paid workforce as well as solo mothers not in the paid workforce were recruited in order to gain a snapshot of the differences and similarities between the two groups of women in regard to their sense of wellbeing and to provide some comparative analysis.

The participants ranged in age from 27 years to 55 years ($M = 39.25$, $SD = 6.76$) and the length of time in a solo parenting role ranged from 6 months to 20 years ($M = 6.45$, $SD = 3.90$). Demographic information also indicated most of the solo mothers (95.9%) had been in the paid workforce prior to having children, over half of the sample (57.5%) had been engaged in skilled work and at the time of the study 50 participants (65.8%) of the sample were in the paid workforce. Residential status was evenly spread across participants who owned or were purchasing their own home (49%) and those who were renting or boarding (51%). The majority of participants (63%) had a tertiary education (either TAFE or university), 18 percent completed Year 12 education and 19 percent completed Year 10 education. See Appendix A for further demographic information.

Recruitment was through newspaper advertisements, flyers on noticeboards (see Appendix B), through newsletters, internet and by word of mouth. Despite widespread advertisement, only 73 of 98 survey forms were returned. Therefore, the sample obtained may not be representative of the general population, particularly as the majority of respondents were from urban Western Australia (See Table 6 for state of residence information). The survey respondents were also invited to take part in an in-depth interview regarding their experiences as solo mothers to form the qualitative component of the research project. No payment was offered for participation.

Table 6.

Participants' State of Residence

State	WA	QLD	NSW	VIC	SA	TAS	ACT	NT
N	40	21	3	1	2	4	2	0

Materials

An information sheet was provided to inform potential participants of the details of the study (Appendix C). A self report demographics sheet was used to collect details of individual solo mothers' backgrounds and current circumstances, including items such as time being a solo parent, education level, number of children, income sources and amounts, residential status, state of residence, and work status (see Appendix D).

The Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), a public domain seven item survey instrument was used to collect data for the quantitative component of the research. The PWI comprises an 11 point (0 to 10) Likert type scale. The PWI measures wellbeing according to satisfaction in areas such as health, personal relationships, safety, standard of living, achievements, community connectedness, and future security (Cummins et al., 2003). Example of questions on the PWI are, "How satisfied are you with your standard of health?" and "How satisfied are you with how safe you feel?" (International Wellbeing Group, 2005). See Appendix E for the full scale.

The PWI was developed by researchers at Deakin University in Melbourne, Victoria in 2001 (Cummins et al., 2003). The survey instrument has been used since 2001 on a six monthly basis to measure the subjective wellbeing of Australians. Each survey has used a geographically representative sample of 2000 respondents aged 18 years and over with an equal gender split (see for example Cummins et al., 2005; Cummins et al., 2007; Cummins et al., 2010).

The PWI has good construct validity. According to the International Wellbeing Group (2006), the seven domains of the PWI are the first level of deconstruction of a

more global question of life satisfaction: “How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?” With the exception of the domain of “Safety” each of the domains in the PWI has unique and/or shared variance which can explain between 30 and 60 percent of variance within the global domain of “Satisfaction with life as a whole”. The domain of Safety has been shown to make a unique contribution in other countries which have used the PWI and so the domain has been retained in Australia as well (International Wellbeing Group).

Thomas (2008) reported concurrent validity with correlation of 0.78 with Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin’s (1985) Satisfaction with Life scale and 0.61 with Pallant’s (2000) Perceived Control of Internal States Scale. Reliability is similarly satisfactory with test-retest reliability over a period of up to two weeks showing a correlation coefficient of 0.84. Further, internal consistency as measured using Cronbach’s alpha is between 0.70 and 0.85 (International Wellbeing Group, 2006).

The PWI was chosen as an appropriate scale to measure subjective wellbeing among the solo mothers who participated in the current study primarily because of its sound psychometric properties, the availability of the scale, the ease of administration and the availability of Australian normative population statistics. Moreover, the uncomplicated nature of the scale ensured respondents would be able to answer the questions without assistance.

Each survey included two added sheets. One contained a list of three questions to gain some preliminary information as to how participants perceived how the changes to Parenting Payment would affect them personally, financially and in the parenting role (see Appendix F). These were open ended questions, for example, “How will these changes affect you personally?” The other sheet was used to invite respondents to participate further in an in-depth interview regarding their experiences as solo mothers and to supply contact details for communication of results (See Appendix G).

Procedure

Ethics approval was gained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University. On contact from potential participants, usually by phone or email, a brief overview of the research was provided. For example, the potential participant was informed that participation was voluntary and that it would involve a survey with a reply paid return envelope mailed to them, or alternatively, the survey could be emailed to them. Participants were informed that there would be an opportunity to participate further in the form of an in-depth taped interview.

Results

Each of the 73 PWI forms was examined for invalid responses. Invalid responses on the PWI are those scores that are consistently maximum or minimum scores. It is considered that such responses are invalid possibly due to lack of understanding or to produce a socially desirable response (International Wellbeing Group, 2005). No invalid responses were detected in the data. The data were converted to standard scores as per instructions in the PWI manual (International Wellbeing Group, 2005). Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. In the first instance, descriptive statistics were obtained (Table 7).

Table 7.

Descriptive statistics for PWI scores for solo mothers and normative population indicating significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing for solo mothers.

Normative data obtained from International Wellbeing Index: *Normative data for the Personal Wellbeing Index, Australia. (2005).* Retrieved from Australian Centre on Quality of Life website:

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/instruments/wellbeing-index/>

Domain	N NP*	n SM^	X NP	\bar{x} SM	SD NP	sd SM
PWI	22912	73	75.02	52.66	12.21	18.57
Standard of living	23673	73	77.28	58.08	17.39	23.13
Personal Health	23668	73	75.09	57.26	19.89	27.60
Achieving in Life	23575	73	74.19	58.22	17.84	22.69
Personal Relationships	23611	73	79.81	43.97	20.50	28.37
Personal Safety	23599	73	77.63	55.34	18.42	28.19
Community-Connectedness	23527	73	70.52	53.56	20.06	27.35
Future Security	23278	73	70.49	42.19	19.96	25.78

*Normative Population

^Solo mothers sample

The means of the combined and separate domains of the PWI for the normative population and the sample of solo mothers were also plotted. These are presented in Figure 3.

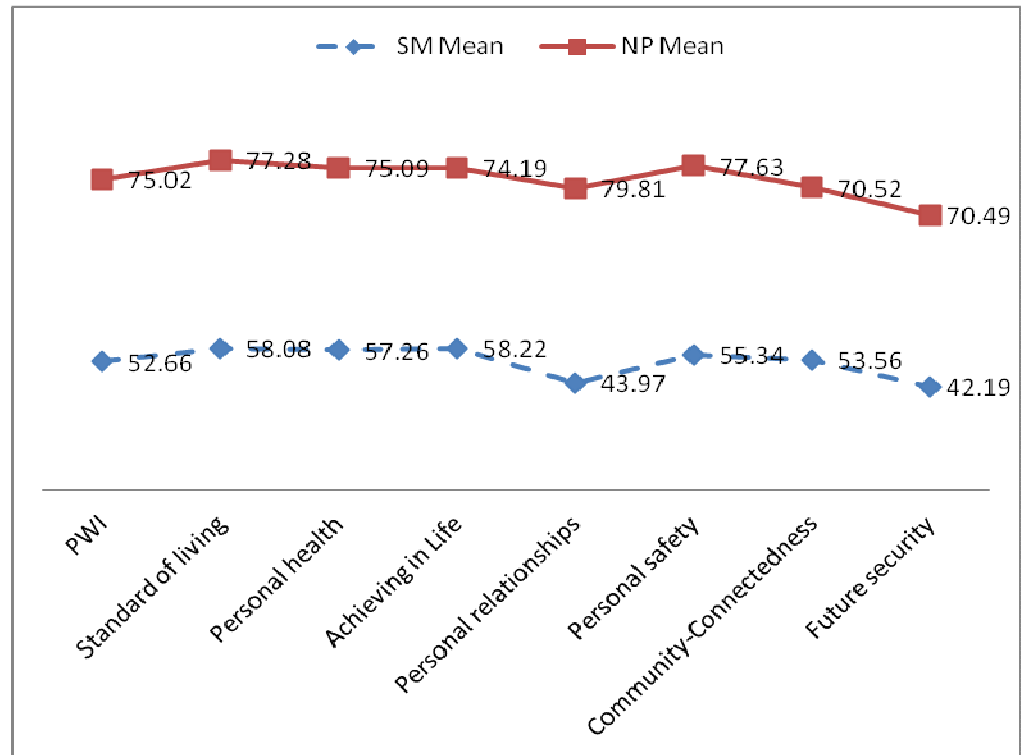


Figure 3. Representation of the means of the combined and separate domains of the PWI for the Normative Population (NP) and Solo Mothers sample (SM).

A one-sample *t*-test indicated that solo mothers had significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing on the seven domains than those of the normative population: $t(72) = -10.28, p < 0.01$. This means that the solo mothers in the current study had self reported significantly lower perceived wellbeing than the general population in Australia. Data for the normative population were gathered from aggregated individual responses from surveys taken over a three year period 2001 to 2004 (International Wellbeing Group, 2005). The normative population for this study included individuals

aged over 18 years with an even split between gender and geographic location (Cummins, Gibson-Prosser, Weinberg, Perera, & Woerner, 2010).

In order to investigate this difference further a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted. A MANOVA detects significant differences between sets of means between groups rather than individual means. Conducting a MANOVA also reduced the chance of a Type I error. The domains of the PWI were used as the dependent variables. Independent variables of interest were “level of income”; “residential status”; “work status”; and “educational attainment”.

Prior to conducting the MANOVA, the data were screened and assumptions were tested and met. No univariate outliers were detected. The Mahalanobis distance with $p < 0.001$ was calculated using regression analysis to determine if there were any multivariate outliers in the data prior to analysis using MANOVA. A critical value of 24.32 was determined using the χ^2 statistical tables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Mahalanobis distance values ranging from 1.51 to 17.23 were calculated and thus, with no values exceeding the critical value of 24.32, no multivariate outliers were detected.

As the cell sizes for the analysis of the current study were uneven, Pillai’s Trace criterion was used to examine the multivariate results. Pillai’s Trace criterion is considered to be robust against unequal cell sizes and so is often the preferred criterion in such cases (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Results of the MANOVA indicated there were significant effects at the multivariate level for the IVs of income $F(14, 60) = 2.44, p < 0.05$; and educational attainment $F(21, 93) = 1.96, p < 0.05$. These results revealed that income and educational attainment had a significant effect on the sets of means of the DVs. Results were scrutinised for issues of collinearity, particularly for work status and income. Please refer to Table 8 for within cells correlation figures. While it appeared that there was a degree of partial correlation between work status and income status ($r^2 = -.558$),

deleting the income status variable from the analysis did not result in significance for the variable of work status in relation to PWI scores. Similarly, deleting the variable of income status and retaining the variable of work status also did not result in a significant result. Thus it was deduced that the variables of work status and income status may be related and may have an effect on PWI scores when combined, but in isolation were not predictive of higher or lower PWI scores. Both variables of work status and income status were retained in the analysis.

Table 8.

Within cells correlations between variables

	Level of income	Residential status	Work status	Educational attainment
Level of income	1.00	-.017	-.558	.058
Residential status	-.017	1.00	.304	-.124
Work Status	-.558	.304	1.00	-.328
Educational attainment	.058	-.124	-.328	1.00

In order to determine which DVs were affected by income or educational attainment, the univariate results were examined. Income was found to have a significant effect upon the domains of “standard of living” $F(2,35) = 3.61, p < 0.05$; “achievements in life” $F(2,35) = 3.67, p < 0.05$; “sense of safety” $F(2,35) = 3.44, p < 0.05$; and “future security” $F(2,35) = 3.97, p < 0.05$. Educational attainment did not have a significant effect on any of the domains however there was indication of influence on the domain of future security, $F(3,35) = 2.88, p = 0.05$.

Post hoc tests using Bonferroni adjustment were conducted to decrease Type 1 error and indicated a statistically significant difference between income of over \$800 per week and income of less than \$650 per week for the domain of standard of living.

Higher scores on this domain were obtained for participants with an income greater than \$800 per week. Further, statistical significance was detected between the means for weekly income levels of less than \$650 and income between \$650 and \$799. This difference indicated a higher level of satisfaction with achievements in life with a moderate income. Post hoc tests did not reveal any significant differences between levels of educational attainment on domains of the PWI.

A Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to determine significance of income on the domains of the PWI using education as a covariate. This assessed if the effects of income remained significant after controlling for education effects on domains of the PWI. At the multivariate level, income remained statistically significant after controlling for the effects of education in relation to the scores on the domains of the PWI: $F(14,122) = 2.39, p < 0.05$. Between-subjects effects were examined and showed that the domain of achievements in life was significantly affected by income even with education as a covariate, $F(2,66) = 7.32, p < 0.05$.

A standard multiple regression confirmed income to be a significant predictor of higher scores on the PWI. The predictor variables chosen were income, educational status and residential status and accounted for 12 percent of the variance. Of the three predictor variables, only income was significant $t = 2.42, p < 0.05$. See Figure 3 for a representation of the regression slope and Figure 4 for the scatterplot.

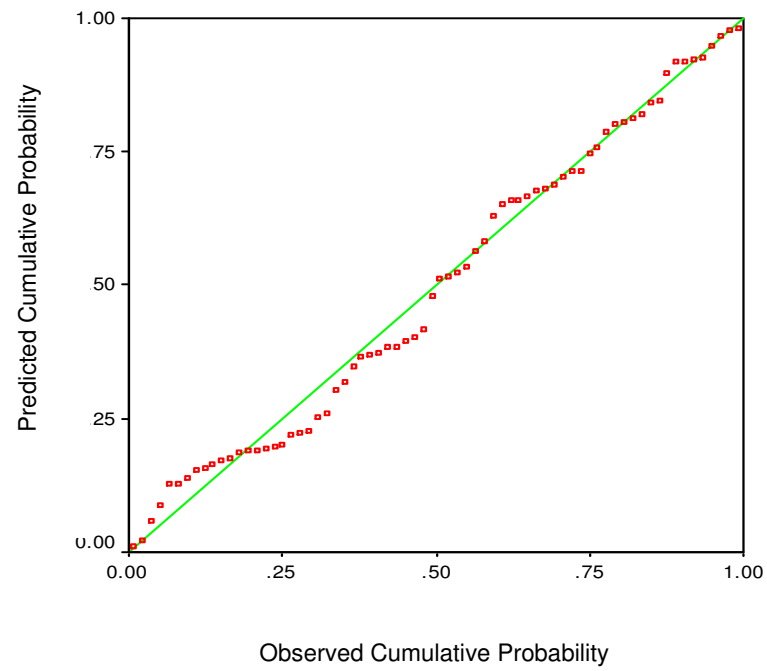


Figure 4. Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardised Residual with Dependent Variable of PWI scores.

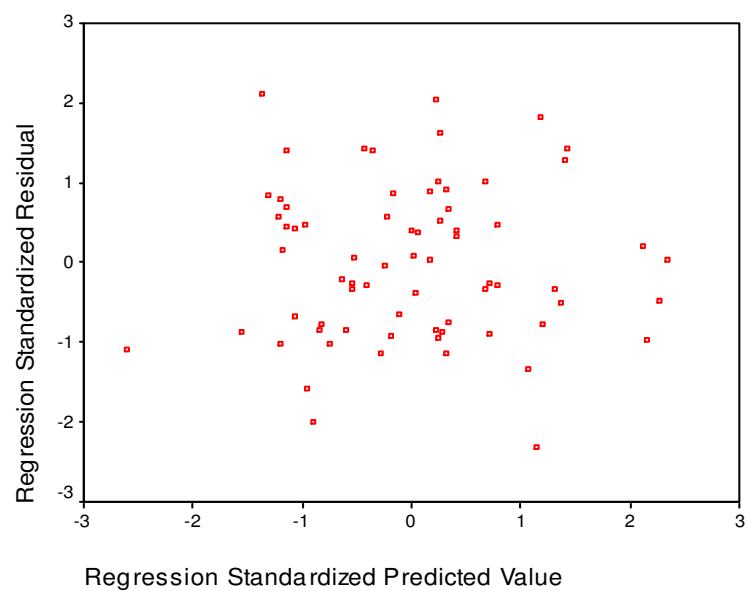


Figure 5. Scatterplot with Dependent Variable of PWI scores.

Discussion

Hypothesis One

Solo mothers will have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing as measured by scores on the PWI compared to the normative population.

The data collected and analysed for the current study supported the first hypothesis. Solo mothers in this study had significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing compared to the normative population. Howe and Pidwell (2004) recognised solo mothers as being one of the most vulnerable groups in Australia. They also maintained solo mothers and partnered mothers should not be categorised differently in terms of needs and assistance required, particularly in entering the paid workforce. Nevertheless, it is clear from the results of the current study that solo mothers have significantly lower levels of wellbeing compared to the normative population in which partnered mothers are included.

There may be a myriad of reasons why solo mothers have lower levels of subjective wellbeing compared to the normative population. One such factor could be the levels of income solo parents receive. The results of the MANOVA indicated income is important in subjective wellbeing and it was clear that the level of income is related to satisfaction with standard of living, achievements in life, sense of safety and future security. It may be that higher income provides solo parents with a sense of mastery and an enhanced internal locus of control (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006; Stewart, 2005). However, separation and divorce may be situations outside of the solo mothers' control, particularly in areas of standard of living and income. Indeed, De Vaus, Gray, Qu and Stanton (2009) found in their examination of data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey collected between 2001 and 2007, that many divorced women have a reduced income post divorce. The same study indicated that women were more likely to prosper less post divorce than men, and men

were more likely to have a fairly constant level of prosperity (de Vaus, Gray, Qu, & Stanton, 2009).

It is also possible that longer periods on welfare and resulting continued low income lead to a change of the set point that is persistently lower than the norm (Carroll, 2005; Lucas, et al., 2004). This decline in the set point of subjective wellbeing could be attributed to lack of paid employment such as Carroll (2005) and Lucas et al. (2004) revealed; however, in the current study the variable of income is a factor identified as significantly affecting subjective wellbeing. It must be noted though, that income and work status were partially correlated in the current study and so both may have an effect on subjective wellbeing. For example, it is probable that greater income is associated with paid work rather than reliance upon welfare payments. Certainly, work was stated as likely to improve self esteem and lead to greater social inclusion thus providing an impetus for Welfare to Work reforms (RGWR, 2000).

Residential status had no statistically significant effect on the wellbeing of solo mothers in the current study. This is surprising as Cummins (2008) identified solo parents who owned a home or had a mortgage had higher levels of subjective wellbeing than those solo parents who were in rented accommodation. Cummins (2008) argued that worry about meeting rental payments were more damaging to subjective wellbeing than worry about meeting mortgage repayments. It is likely then that the low income of the solo mothers within the current study was identified as the salient factor rather than residential status. Indeed income was a significant predictor for subjective wellbeing as identified through the regression analysis.

Accumulation of assets, insurance, and superannuation, as well as lack of debt (Headey & Wooden, 2004) may help to explain the significant difference between the means for weekly income levels of less than \$650 and income between \$650 and \$799 in relation to satisfaction with achievements in life for the solo mothers in the current

study. However, there is no ready explanation why this was not also apparent for solo mothers with a weekly income of over \$800. Higher income though is often linked to longer working hours for solo mothers. It is quite possible solo mothers who have a home-centred lifestyle preference and earn over \$800 per week, experience some role conflict if paid work takes greater priority over family and caring responsibilities (Baxter, 2005; Burgess & Strachan, 2005; Callister, 2005). Perhaps then, income is a protective factor (Cummins, 2008) so long as the solo mother does not experience role conflict.

De Vaus, Gray, Qu and Stanton (2009) also found in their examination of data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey collected between 2001 and 2007, that many divorced women have a reduced income post divorce. The same study indicated that women were more likely to prosper less post divorce than men, and men were more likely to have a fairly constant level of prosperity (de Vaus, Gray, Qu, & Stanton, 2009).

Income was identified to be a predictor for subjective wellbeing in the current study. Cummins (2008) also maintained income is a protective factor for subjective wellbeing with subjective wellbeing rising alongside increases in income. It is interesting to note also, that the lower the income, the smaller the increase of income required for a substantial rise in subjective wellbeing (Cummins, 2008). However, Cummins (2008) also noted that happiness as measured by subjective wellbeing, reaches a ceiling at income of just over \$100,000 per annum or more than \$1900 per week.

Although income is noted as a predictor of subjective wellbeing, Cummins (2008) argued that relationships also make a substantial impact. In particular, stable relationships with others can protect the set point of an individual's wellbeing, regardless of income (Cummins, Walter, & Woerner, 2007). This would explain the

overall low levels of wellbeing found among the solo mothers in the current study as they had little or no support from the father/s of the children in most cases as well as having low incomes. Further, many of the solo mothers in the current study received little or no financial assistance from the father of the child/children.

Although educational attainment did not have a statistically significant effect on the DVs in the current study, Ahrens and Ryff (2006) have previously documented that education can be predictive of increased wellbeing due to the likelihood of a woman having multiple roles such as an employee and mother and subsequent social integration. Hakim (2003) also asserted educational attainment may influence subjective wellbeing through the development of increased skills and better employment opportunities. This may be particularly salient for solo mothers who have a preference to work for income or are able to adapt to work, and hence better income (Hakim, 2003). However, this was not supported by the results of the MANCOVA which failed to reveal any effects of educational attainment on the significant results for income in the current study.

The reasons for the lower levels of wellbeing among solo mothers have been explored by various researchers (e.g. Butterworth, 2003; Butterworth, et al., 2006; Cummins, 2008; De Vaus, Gray, Qu, and Stanton, 2009; Saunders & Adelman, 2006). Lower levels of wellbeing among solo mothers is possibly due to a combination of effects including low income, poor relationships with ex-partners, low levels of interaction with the wider community and high levels of stress (Cummins, 2008). Indeed, the variable of income indicated statistically significant effects on subjective wellbeing at the multivariate level and as a predictor for subjective wellbeing. However, educational attainment appeared to have only a weak effect on subjective wellbeing.

Hypothesis Two

Solo mothers who are in the paid workforce will have significantly higher levels of subjective wellbeing as measured by scores on the PWI compared to solo mothers who are not in the paid workforce.

Given that paid work had previously been identified to build self esteem (RGWR, 2000), it was expected that the solo mothers who were in the paid workforce would have higher levels of wellbeing. This hypothesis was not supported by the results. There was no statistically significant difference in the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers who were in the paid workforce compared to those who were reliant upon welfare.

The absence of significant difference in subjective wellbeing between solo mothers who are in the paid workforce and those who are not, argues against the RGWR's assumption that paid work has many positive benefits in terms of social participation and self esteem. Further, this finding differs from those of Carroll (2005) who determined individuals who moved into employment had higher levels of satisfaction with life and those who were unemployed had lower levels of satisfaction with life. Similarly, Lucas et al. (2004) argued that significant life events, such as unemployment, could lower the set point of subjective wellbeing. It is possible that other factors may be responsible for this lack of significance such as the type of work the solo mothers in the current study engaged in and lack of support at the end of the work day (Drago et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2008).

In the current study, it may be the significant life event of being a solo parent that is the trigger for low levels of subjective wellbeing rather than unemployment. Individual lifestyle preferences (Hakim, 2003) and identity construction (Johnston & Swanson, 2003) may also help to explain the lack of significant difference between solo mothers who are in the paid workforce and those who are not. Working from necessity

for financial gain, rather than preference may indeed affect an individual's wellbeing as role conflict is likely to develop. Further, the likelihood of multiple role conflict is greater in solo mothers who do paid work as there is no resident partner on whom to rely to assist in caring for the children and keeping the house (Drago et al., 2007). Nonetheless, solo mothers who have good social and family support, as well as good child care arrangements with the children's father, are less likely to experience multiple role stress (Morehead, 2005).

Lower socioeconomic status is aligned with poorer health outcomes and social exclusion (Stewart et al., 2008). As solo mothers are over-represented in the lower socio-economic communities, it is not surprising that they experience lower levels of wellbeing (Cummins et al., 2006; Saunders & Adelman, 2006). Further, individuals from lower socioeconomic groups can also be time poor due to working long hours in poorly paid jobs just to "make ends meet" (Stewart et al., 2008).

Cummins et al. (2008) reported consistently lower levels of wellbeing for individuals with a low income compared to those with higher incomes, regardless of marital status. Since 2001, when the PWI was first used to measure the subjective wellbeing of Australians, divorced and separated women have been identified to be within the group most likely to have the lowest levels of subjective wellbeing (Cummins, 2008). It appears then, that level of income is a salient factor for subjective wellbeing rather than actual paid work for the participants in the current study. As such it may not be paid work in itself that leads to higher levels of wellbeing but rather remuneration associated with work and income derived from other sources such as child support payments.

The regression analysis suggested level of income accounts for less than 12 percent of the variance explaining subjective wellbeing for the solo mothers in the current study. Further, the apparent inconsistency of income related to levels of

wellbeing as previously noted, may point to a host of factors that interact to affect wellbeing among this group, not readily discernible from quantitative research. Indeed, Helliwell and Huang (2011) suggest that non-financial factors associated with unemployment are more important than financial hardship.

While the quantitative part of the current study was useful in establishing that overall, the solo mothers in this study had lower levels of wellbeing than the normative population; more information was required to further investigate the factors influencing subjective wellbeing. Further investigation using qualitative methods was considered appropriate to obtain information regarding the meanings behind the quantitative results. These findings then would provide rich informative data to establish how wellbeing for the solo mothers in the current study was constructed. Moreover, the qualitative investigation would explore in depth, the issues that most affected the solo mothers in the current study.

Limitations and Strengths

Limitations of the quantitative section of the current study included the use of a self report instrument (PWI) which could result in potential bias towards socially desirable answers (Fisher & Katz, 2000). Further, a comparison group of partnered mothers may have lent weight to the findings rather than the normative population comparison group. A strength of the current quantitative section was the use of a well documented valid and reliable test instrument which lends credibility to the results.

Further limitations of the current study were the uneven distribution of participants across states and between rural and metropolitan areas as well as the inclusion of solo mothers receiving DSP rather than PPS, thus indicating serious health issues which may have skewed the results.

Income information may also have been incorrectly reported as some participants did not report all sources of income or were unsure of how much income

they received. Additionally, even though gross income amounts were requested, there is no assurance that gross rather than net income was reported. The relatively small self selecting sample may also have skewed results particularly in relation to the findings associated with work and income status.

Chapter Eight

Part Two - Qualitative study

This chapter lists the research questions pertinent to the qualitative investigation followed by the method employed. The findings obtained through in-depth interviews comprise a substantial portion of this chapter. Interviews were conducted with 15 of the original 73 participants. The interviews served to reveal consistent themes related to the experiences of the solo mothers within the context of an interactive system. Themes revealed included Choices which related to the solo mothers' parenting choices, daily choices and work choices; Supports with supporting children, financial support, and practical and emotional support; Power which referred to a patriarchal style of government and lack of empathy; and finally Values and Mixed Messages incorporating sub themes of family structures and stereotypes.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to investigate several areas of concern:

1. Is there a relationship between paid work and wellbeing for solo mothers?
2. Is there a relationship between receipt of income support such as parenting payment, family tax benefit, and child support payments, and wellbeing for solo mothers who are not in the paid workforce?
3. What are the differences and similarities between solo mothers who are in receipt of only some of the income supports available compared to those solo mothers who are in receipt of all income supports, in terms of their wellbeing?
4. How fair do solo mothers perceive the manner in which the Welfare to Work policy has been decided upon?
5. How fair do solo mothers perceive the manner in which the Welfare to Work policy will be implemented?

Method**Participants**

Of the 73 original participants from Part One of the current study, 25 were contacted to arrange an interview however, only 15 were interviewed either face to face (7) or via telephone (8) (see Appendix L for brief biographies of the participants). Generally, the telephone interviews were conducted with interstate participants or with those participants who had a preference for telephone interview. The 15 interviewees comprised five solo mothers who did paid work full time, five who did paid work part time and the remaining five solo mothers studied, were on DSP or were not engaged in the paid workforce at that time. Participants were chosen this way to provide an even

spread of solo mothers not directly affected by welfare changes, to those who were received partial welfare support and those who depended primarily on welfare support. Of the participants, seven received regular child support payments, while the remainder received minimal or no payments. Only five fathers had contact with their child/children and nine fathers either had irregular contact or no contact. For the fathers who had regular contact, this mainly consisted of fortnightly contact, however, in some instances this was increased if the children participated in sports.

Materials

The interviews were semi-structured and were audio-recorded. The interview schedule used questions such as “Tell me what it’s like being a solo parent?” Questions were followed by prompts such as “Tell me more about...” when information needed elaboration (see Appendix H for the full interview schedule). The interview questions were piloted on a small sample of solo mothers to establish clarity and to ensure the questions elicited the responses that would answer the research questions.

Each participant was provided with an information sheet (see Appendices I) and a consent form (see Appendix J). For telephone interviews, the information sheet was read out. The participant was asked formally if they consented to the interview being conducted over the telephone. A digital audio recorder was used to record each interview.

Procedure

The answers to the open ended questions (Appendix F) were firstly scrutinised to gain some general impressions of the participants’ perceptions of how the Welfare to Work reforms would affect them. Potential participants for interviews were screened to ensure a mix of solo mothers who are engaged in part time paid work, full time paid work and those who are not engaged in paid work. A selection of participants willing to be interviewed were contacted and invited to take part in an interview. A code was

attached to each participant interviewed and corresponding information gathered from the demographics sheet and survey. The participants were then interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to one and a half hours. A total of 15 interviews were conducted either face to face in a private setting (7) such as the participant's home or over the telephone (8). Telephone interviews were conducted in an office with only the interviewer present. Face to face interviews were conducted in the participant's home or a mutually convenient and private location. Each interview was audio recorded, then transcribed verbatim to enable thematic analysis.

Qualitative Findings and Interpretations

Analysis

The results of the quantitative component of the current study indicated a significant difference for subjective wellbeing between solo mothers in this study and the normative population. The qualitative component therefore, was of particular interest as it explored in more depth, the salient factors influencing the subjective wellbeing of solo mothers.

Each of the recorded interviews was transcribed by the researcher. Transcription allowed the researcher to become immersed in the data and gather overall impressions of the social reality for each participant (Daly, 2007). Transcripts were identified with numbers to protect the participant's identity and each line was numbered to allow for ease of reference (Daly, 2007). Following transcription, the researcher became more familiar with the content by reading and re-reading each transcript. As the interview schedule had been based on topics such as parenting, work, welfare reforms and fairness, this served to act as a guide for detecting themes. Similar to the method of "framework" qualitative data analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002), notes were written in the margins of the transcripts, identifying broad themes into which issues revealed by participants could be placed (see Appendix K).

In order to reduce the data, these broad themes were then studied, and similar themes were grouped together under one heading. Quotes were then taken from the transcripts and along with the line reference and identifier, were placed under headings related to each of the themes (see Appendix K for an example of the process).

To ensure rigour, an audit trail was maintained. An audit trail is a record of decisions made during the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the current study the audit trail consisted of research notes, memos, recorded thoughts about the process and emerging findings as well as journaling considerations of the researcher's own personal circumstances that might influence the analysis. Integral to the audit trail was continued reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to self examination and monitoring in terms of the researcher's beliefs and perceptions regarding the data to prevent researcher bias (Daly, 2007). Discussions with others (colleagues and supervisors) also served to clarify thoughts and to minimise bias.

Triangulation was also a method used to enhance rigour by establishment of credibility. Credibility refers to the accurate reflection of participants' own beliefs and perceptions within the data (Nagy & Viney, 1994). The main form of triangulation for the current study was the mixed methods approach where each method confirmed findings of the other. Member checking was also used as a part of triangulation. This involved sending participants completed transcripts and an interpreted summary of the transcript to ensure appropriate and correct interpretations.

As the data were refined, it became apparent that the solo mothers in the current study identified as being part of a system similar to that as described by Bronfenbrenner (1986). Bronfenbrenner's model of a nested system illustrated relationships at different levels that have an effect on each individual. He posited that individuals were affected by family dynamics as well as social events and the cultural setting. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner (1986) explained the relationships were two way with not only the

individual being affected, but the individual also impacting upon family, social settings and the overarching cultural environment. Therefore, the relationships and networks within a system, including that of a solo mother, may be complex and dynamic (See Figure 6 for a representation of a typical solo mother's system).

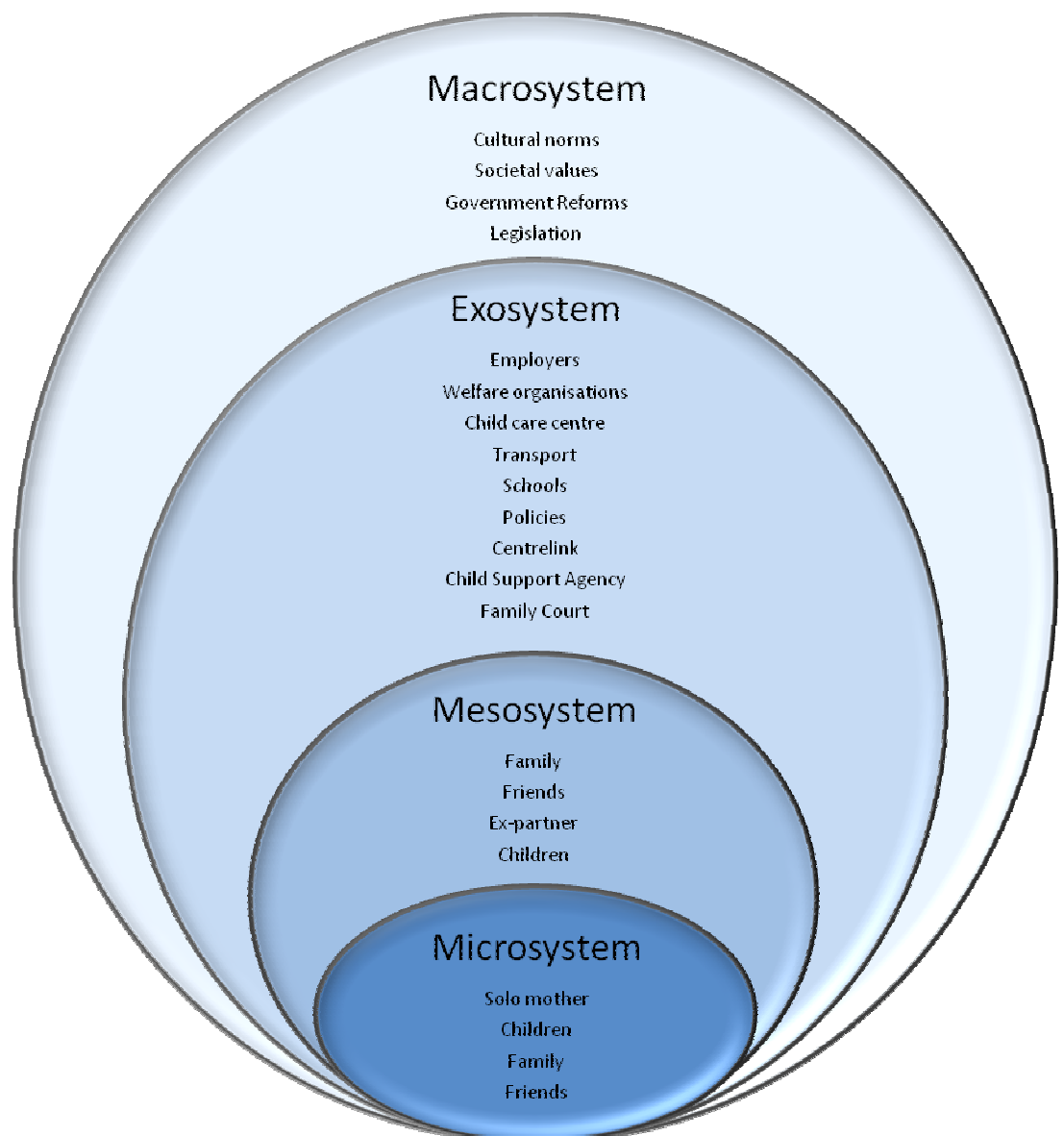


Figure 6. Nested systems model for solo mothers

Bronfenbrenner (1977) described his nested systems model as comprising four levels. Although usually applied to child development, the model is applicable to any individual. At the very core of the system is the microsystem where the main interactions between the individual and the immediate environment occur. There may be more than one microsystem that an individual moves within. For a solo mother there may be several microsystems such as the interactions within her immediate family (i.e. with her children), her original family (i.e. her parents and siblings) and her paid work microsystem. There may also be other microsystems such as church groups, or mothers' groups.

The mesosystem includes interactions between the different microsystems, with each one potentially influencing the other microsystem. For example, the original family microsystem of the solo mother, often impacts upon the microsystem of the solo mother's immediate family and vice versa. Further, the more microsystems there are the more interrelations and interactions.

Settings that affect an individual may not be experienced firsthand and are part of the exosystem. For example, settings in which a solo mother's children may be involved in may influence behaviour, thus impacting on the solo mother's immediate family microsystem. Further, changes to policies and legislation may affect the solo mother in areas such as child care, child support and social security.

The overarching system is that of the macrosystem, which determines the culture or subculture within which the microsystems, mesosystem and exosystem all interact. Most Westernised nations, including Australia, traditionally held marriage to be a way to establish social, economic and political connections up until the 18th century (Coontz, 2004). Marriage was rarely instigated as a result of love or affection and divorce was uncommon up until the late 18th century. Indeed Coontz (2004) reported that love or affection was more often a by-product of living and working together and

love was not considered to be a suitable reason to marry. As the reasons for marrying changed from social, economic and political gains to that of love, the stability of marriage also changed.

Prior to the introduction of the Family Law Act 1975, the crude divorce rate was approximately one per 1,000 people. After 1975, this rate increased dramatically to over four in 1,000 people (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). In more recent years the rate of divorce has stabilised with between two and three divorces per 1000 people. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) and currently, approximately one-third of all marriages in Australia end in divorce (Pink, 2010). Solo parent headed families have become more “normal” and it is likely other family forms (e.g. same sex parent families) will also be accepted as legitimate family structures. Nevertheless, the traditional family structure of heterosexual cohabitating parents and children remains the ideal and this has been actively promoted by the recent Howard government (Short, 2007).

Solo mothers in the current study had many different types of relationships including some that were unique to individual identity as solo mothers. For example, relationships with ex-husbands, ex-partners and government agencies such as Child Support Agency were specific to many of the solo mothers in this study. Other relationships were formed as a direct result of becoming a solo mother such as relationships with Centrelink (to receive welfare payments) and employers (to receive income). Many other relationships were changed, strengthened or weakened as a consequence of solo motherhood, either directly or indirectly such as relationships with children, family members or friends.

Within the context of living and interacting within a system, four themes emerged from the transcribed interviews. The themes were named “Choices”, “Supports”, “Power”, and “Values and Mixed Messages”. Within each of the four main

themes, several sub themes were also defined. Figure 7 provides a representation of the themes and sub themes.

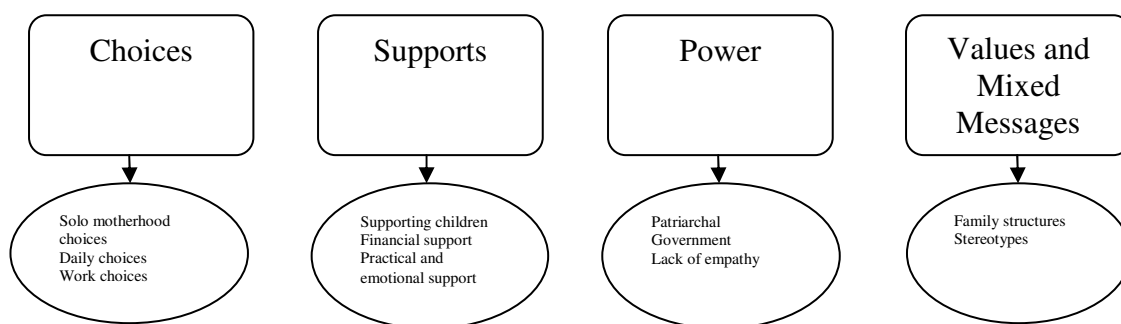


Figure 7. Representation of themes and sub themes

Each solo mother was asked about her preference and choice to do paid work or remain at home to care for the children. Questions about the level of support that was needed or given to raise children or to provide income were asked, thus eliciting the themes of Choices and Supports. Further, responses regarding Power, for example the power of Federal Government to introduce reforms that potentially directly affected solo mothers explored some issues surrounding procedural fairness. Values and Mixed Messages was revealed as a theme through responses to questions about experiences as a solo mother and conflicting messages from the government about parenting. Embedded within the theme of Values and Mixed Messages there are also the stereotypes of solo mothers and negative perception that, although becoming less common, are still held in society and of which many of the solo mothers in the study had experience.

The themes of Choices, Supports, Power, and Values and Mixed Messages are intertwined in complex and dynamic ways and so may overlap at times. However, for the purpose of clarity, the themes and sub-themes will be examined individually in detail in the contexts experienced by the solo mothers in this study.

Choices

Solo motherhood.

Choice or lack of choice was a recurring theme throughout the interviews, indicating a varying degree of perceived choice in different areas of each of the mothers' lives. Solo motherhood may result from a number of life events. For example, separation and divorce are the most common reasons for solo motherhood in Australian society today (ABS, 2007). The separation or divorce may be instigated by either partner, however is more often initiated by the woman (Weston & Qu, 2009). A common reason a woman may leave her husband is domestic violence and to feel safer (Kaslow, 2001). For example, Maria spoke of experiencing violence in her marriage "*I had sexual violence in my marriage so I'm not as fearful as a woman in terms of my personal safety [since separating]*". Sexual violence is but one aspect of domestic violence. Other forms of domestic violence that may not be recognised as abuse include controlling behaviours such as isolating women from friends, and emotional abuse such as repeated put-downs or manipulation (Rawsthorne, 2006).

Other reasons for solo motherhood are death of a partner, unplanned pregnancy and desire by a single woman to bear and raise a child (Richardson, 1993). Frequently though, solo motherhood is not a choice many mothers make but a condition that is imposed upon them (Steil, 2001). The lack of choice of solo parenthood, such as when the husband left the relationship, was frequently mentioned by the mothers as something they had not anticipated when they had children "*I certainly didn't plan on being one [solo parent]. That's the thing, people don't get married and have kids with the*

ambition of doing it alone” (Grace). A further distinction was made between solo parenting and single parenting by one mother. Lucy explained her identity as a solo mother thus:

A lot of people assume that if you've got a child, you've got a partner, and if you don't have a partner, then the partner is still a part of that child's life. I don't think many people understand the difference between being a single parent and being a solo parent. But I'm not a single parent, I'm a solo parent.

For Lucy, being a solo mother was defined as being solely responsible and the father of her child not having any influence or input towards her child's life.

Although the majority of mothers were solo through breakdown of marriage, one of the mothers was a widow and two of the solo mothers had chosen to raise their children alone from birth. While partnered motherhood is socially accepted and applauded, until recent years, when a single woman announced pregnancy it was assumed that the woman was having a child for selfish reasons or was a mistake or outside of the woman's control (Richardson, 1993). Further, reasons for motherhood may be similar between single women and partnered women including a desire to have a child as part of fulfilling a traditional female role (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Nevertheless, the stigma of raising children alone and intentionally is slowly lifting (Littler, 2008).

Evans and Kelley (2004) suggest that women are much happier when they are married or at least partnered than when they are single. Nevertheless, it became apparent during interviews that while solo motherhood was not an ideal situation for most, in some instances it was preferable to the preceding partnered relationship. Further, one mother who chose to parent alone was happy to be a solo parent “I'm

happy being single and if someone else comes along it's just going to be a bonus sort of thing...I think you've got to get used to being on your own before you can be in a relationship" (Joy).

Although solo parenting is often described as being particularly difficult, Nomaguchi and Milkie (2003) suggested it is difficult to separate the difficulties of parenting from being a single woman or partnered woman as the effects appear to be entwined. Additionally, there may be other contextual factors that affect the perception of parenting difficulties including multiple roles, economic hardship and daily demands. Nomaguchi and Milkie asserted that being a mother, regardless of solo or partnered status, carries a much greater workload, as mothers frequently remain as the principal caregiver, thus perhaps adding to stress that is already present.

Becoming a solo mother also meant for some of the mothers, taking on roles that fell outside their gender ideology. Duties that had previously been undertaken by the father such as attending children's sports events or disciplining were then relegated to the mother. Anna explained her perception of taking on two distinct parenting roles *"I'm a very outdoors person. I like doing sport. So it's fortunate that I enjoy doing that sort of thing. And it's where I play the father role"*. Interestingly, Ahrens and Ryff (2006) and Bernstein (2001) assert multiple roles that women take on can affect a mother's wellbeing; however whether the effect is detrimental or positive for the mother's wellbeing is dependent upon whether or not roles are personally enjoyable or desirable. While it is apparent from Anna's comment that adding the father role was not unduly disturbing for her and provided some satisfaction, this was not so for all participants.

For instance, a widowed solo mother taking on the traditional father duty of discipline considered herself to inadequate in the role *"I have all boys so you know it's hard to, well you can't be a father but you've still got to discipline them but you find*

when they get to their teenage years you're just a woman and they get stronger than you and that becomes very, very difficult" (Rita). This comment is consistent with findings from Kroska's (2009) study of survey data of role identity and distress caused by inconsistency of roles. Although Kroska's study was based on couples' data, the findings indicated that women, who undertake tasks that fall outside their gendered ideology, may have feelings of powerlessness, at times resulting in inaction. Furthermore, Hodgson, et al. (2001) identified increased demands of a solo mother's time and resultant decreased personal time, as stressful.

It is evident that solo motherhood for some of the mothers in the current study, was a burden, particularly if solo motherhood was an imposition rather than a conscious choice of circumstance. Further the complete absence of the ex partner (whether through death or unwillingness to be in contact with the family) appeared to add to stress experienced by the mothers. However, for mothers who had chosen solo motherhood, there appeared to be a better fit with the identity of solo mother and they exhibited signs of self reliance and confidence in their own abilities.

Daily choices.

The most consistent response when asked about benefits of solo parenting was the lack of conflict with others regarding decision making. The majority of solo parents stated how pleasant it was to be able to make decisions without the need to consult a partner *"I get to do things my way, on my timetable. I hear about sometimes the way people compromise when they're in a couple over parenting issues. And I'm glad sometimes that I don't have to do that"* (Chris). Indeed, Ahrens and Ryff (2006) suggested the influence of having multiple roles, having control over circumstances and autonomy can result in greater wellbeing.

However, Nomaguchi and Milkie (2003) determined in their study of the effects of raising children on the wellbeing of solo and partnered parents, that while solo

mothers may have less conflict than partnered mothers, solo mothers have lower levels of wellbeing and may indeed be more likely to suffer depression. Comments made by some of the solo mothers in the current study included: *"...it's frustrating and annoying and really painful at times where I have no adult to talk to about the problems, the finances and things like that"* (Ellen). Mary also found it difficult to come to terms with having to make all of the decisions alone: *"You always question that you are doing the right thing. You always think you are doing the best for them but you don't have anybody else to sound that off, to get that reassurance. It's been hard"*.

Two of the mothers interviewed were in receipt of Disability Support Pension. Difficult choices were made frequently by one mother as she struggled to provide sufficiently for her two children – one of whom experienced significant health problems. Ellen told of her sacrificing her own needs to care for her children *"So yeah, I will go without in more ways than one. To make sure they've got access to what they need to have"*. This finding is congruent with findings from Hamilton and Catterall's (2007) study of consumption practices among solo mothers. In Hamilton and Catterall's study, the majority of the 24 solo mothers stated the children's needs came before the mothers' needs in an attempt to provide a "normal" life for the children. Further, the statement by Ellen is also supported by Saunders and Adelman's research that indicated some families, particularly those headed by solo parents, experienced hardship attempting to live within financial means (Saunders & Adelman, 2006).

Although providing for both herself and her children adequately appeared to be extremely difficult for Ellen, other solo mothers also had to choose between activities for children and coping with normal day to day living expenses. Saunders and Adelman (2006) declared financial hardship can lead to social exclusion and deprivation. For example, even though Rita was working in the paid workforce she felt she had to choose against spending money on extracurricular activities for her children:

“...you know, it’s unfair that my kids can’t even join a football club...because you can’t afford it. So you know, just to do normal things that you can’t do”.

Being a solo mother carries with it a “double edged sword” of being able to make day to day decisions without having to consult with a partner, however it also means there is no confirmation that a good decision or the right decision has been made, especially for important decisions. Some day to day decisions that are often automatic and simple decisions for a lot of families, were somewhat more difficult for solo mothers who had to decide whether to put personal needs ahead of children’s needs.

Work choices.

The choice to work in paid employment was made difficult for some of the solo mothers for many reasons. These included the desire to work in paid employment, availability of child care, work skills, possible financial hardship if PPS was decreased, available paid work opportunities, and degree of flexibility in work places. The desire to work in paid employment was often salient for the solo mothers in the current study; however the desire resulted from different reasons.

Congruent with Hakim’s (1998) theory of women’s work and life preferences, some mothers identified that they were happiest working in the paid workforce. For example, Anna was open in her declaration of wanting to be involved in paid work *“I’m very maternal in one sense but I’m very – I was always going to be a professional scientist. I’ve never wanted to stay at home. I’ve always wanted to work”* however, she did acknowledge that it was not necessarily as a solo mother that she would continue in full time work *“But I don’t think I ever intended on being alone”*. There were also solo mothers who spoke of primarily staying at home which is consistent with the home preference (Hakim, 1999), *“I had children to look after them and bring them up, not to go out to work...that’s something I’ve always wanted to do myself”* (Grace). Parenting as a full time job has been cited as a reason why some solo mothers prefer to stay at

home to care for children rather than enter the paid workforce (Brown & Joyce, 2007). Indeed one mother claimed *“I sort of feel that being a mother is a full time job in itself and it needs to be recognised as such”* (Fran).

Other solo mothers worked part time for pay, however this was invariably stated as a necessity to supplement PPS or to enable a reasonable standard of living *“I can’t really have that opportunity [stay home full time] because I can’t afford to. Yeah I pretty much have to work part time. That has to cover the mortgage and most of the time that’s pretty much all it does”* (Joy). Indeed, Gray, et al. (2002) recognised that mortgage commitment was sufficient incentive for solo mothers to seek part time paid work.

Financial gain was an important determinant for choosing to do paid work. An increase in income allowed some of the solo mothers to provide important benefits for their children. For example, some mothers worked part time or full time for pay to enable them to provide better schools or activities for their children *“I needed to put one of my sons in a decent school. To do that I had to work because there was no way I could meet the fees”* (Rita); *“It’s really hard to afford what all the other kids do like the ballet and...Mine do swimming lessons but that’s kind of it”* (Jenny). Being able to provide all that was required for her children at school was an important achievement for one mother:

I want to make sure that the kids are just like normal kids at school – that they don’t stick out, they don’t look any different and they just blend in...happy and ...achieving as much as they possibly can without going without or not having the right things (Mary).

Although financial gain was considered to be a benefit of doing paid work, there were considerable fears among some of the solo mothers who were interviewed. Finding a job, while complying with participation rules to receive PPS was considered as possibly financially detrimental for the family. A frequent response regarding the

adequacy of PPS or DSP in terms of meeting financial obligations was that it was only just enough to pay some bills and there was never enough for anything extra. For some mothers the PPS even failed to provide for basic needs and as a result, work was imperative. For example, *“I think it’s a necessity actually [paid work] because it’s very difficult to survive on a Centrelink payment and having kids. I’ve done that for a short period of time”* (Liz). Another solo mother who did occasional paid casual work explained:

I think it’s a lot of money[PPS] but...when you’ve got rent you get about \$500 [per fortnight]. It’s a lot of money to get given I think when you’re not going to the workplace but when rent’s \$230, your car payments are \$80 and you’ve got some food. That’s it. How do you pay your bills? It’s like you know, it’s good that you get that, but if you’ve got nothing else, it doesn’t go anywhere (Grace).

While PPS continued for solo mothers in part time employment up to a threshold of \$170.60 per fortnight (for one child families), the amount of PPS decreased incrementally by 40 cents in every dollar earned above \$170.60 per fortnight thereafter. This incremental decrease of PPS affected some solo mothers’ decisions on whether to return to the paid workforce and if it was financially beneficial. Although an American study by Danziger, Heflin, Corcoran, et al. (2002) found that returning to paid work was financially advantageous, there were concerns by Australian peak council for community and welfare, ACOSS (2005) that solo mothers would find hardship when PPS was reduced as income increased without accounting for other costs such as child care and transport. A study conducted by Gray, et al. (2002) also highlighted concerns by solo parents regarding negligible financial benefits on return to paid work and Walter (2002) also expressed concern that there could be deterioration in material wellbeing and even decline into further financial hardship for some solo mothers who entered the

paid workforce. Similarly, several solo mothers in this study had concerns about entering the paid workforce:

Like even if you do work, after you earn \$70 a week they take 50 cents in the dollar out. It's like you just can't get ahead. They don't allow you to get ahead (Grace);

By the time you've worked and paid for the child care you think, well what have I actually made? I haven't made any money really. And lots of times actually less, you can be worse off depending on where you are working (Lyn);

I personally would love to go back to work. I have applied for work but then realised that pay wise I would only just make, I would be worse off going back to work having to find child care, um, I'd be running – I mean I'm in debt now but I would be in huger debt if I was working (Ellen).

Comparable concerns of not being able to get ahead were expressed by (Anna) even though she was working full time in the paid workforce and not on PPS:

...it would be nice to have additional financial support for child care. It can be very expensive and increases quite dramatically...when they're [children] on holiday 3 months of the year...it's very difficult to make ends meet. I see myself on a very good income but the way the system works is that as your income increases, the subsidy I got from the government was reduced. So I was actually worse off because of an increase in salary...this happens to me continuously.

The dilemma of entering the paid workforce after becoming a solo mother may be complicated by the stereotyping of work roles. Indeed, Güngör and Biernat (2009) suggested that often women are stereotyped into less traditionally masculine employment and are often offered less equitable wages. This was the cause of some angst for one mother:

...you're forced into the situation and you're forced to being able to survive and having to rely on government benefits. It would be nice if you could go out into the workforce and earn as much...I certainly don't – as much as man (Rita).

Even though some women spoke about choosing to do paid work, some women considered working in the paid workforce to be a duty. For example, Wendy stated in her interview *“realistically being on a pension means I owe something. It’s not like I ever expected it to be a bludge or a right”*. Similarly, mutual obligations in the social security system, as proposed by the RGWR (2000), appear to support the notion that welfare payments such as PPS should be primarily provided in receipt of paid workforce participation. However, concerns such as appropriate child care may influence the willingness and/or ability for solo mothers to participate in paid employment.

Child care was a major issue for some of the mothers. Options for suitable child care were limited by the choice of child care centres in the area. One solo mother in particular had to rely on a lower quality of child care for her daughter because of the area she lived in (metropolitan Sydney) *“The one [child care centre] she’s at, at the moment is not much chop but I don’t have much choice”* (Lucy). Cobb-Clark, Liu and Mitchell (2000) indicated in their study regarding child care choices, that the cost of child care did not prevent mothers from doing paid work; however it did affect the quality of affordable child care available.

Other mothers were concerned about the lack of after school care in their area *“...it’s difficult to find a job that suits the hours I need, particularly in this area because there’s no after school care available”* (Chris). Solo mothers who relied on paid weekend work experienced difficulty finding suitable child care especially if there was no family support and this eroded any likely financial gain *“There’s one that does weekends, it’s very expensive as you can imagine”* (Chris). Indeed, as Baker (2008) pointed out in her paper regarding policy for paid work and child care, many solo parent families experience significant financial hardship despite being able to claim a 30 percent rebate on child care expenses.

Bojer (2002) asserted that women who have spent their married or partnered life caring for the home and the family are disadvantaged if employment in the paid workforce is necessary or required following a divorce or separation. The reasons for this may be several such as decreased opportunities for overtime, and family needs. Further, work skills may be lacking or outdated for many mothers (Gray, et al., 2003).

The lack of suitable work skills was a concern for several solo mothers who participated in this study. For example, Lyn recognised her need for training:

I do understand that um, you know, the need to get people out and working but I think probably there needs to be a bit more help like training and stuff. A lot of them are stuck at home like me and I need to retrain definitely to get back into the workforce.

Lyn also talked about a need to boost her confidence levels *“I have some confidence and self esteem issues. I’m quite confronted when I think about going out to work. A little bit worried about that. So I need a bit of help that way”*. Learning new skills can be beneficial for wellbeing in terms of feeling capable (Angleton, 2005). In her examination of a pilot program to increase paid work participation for solo mothers, Angleton found that personal development increased confidence and self esteem among the mothers, thus enabling the mothers to become more independent and to confidently apply for jobs.

Recent experience is more likely to result in obtaining a job that can use the skills an individual already possesses. According to Hall, et al. (2000), it is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals to obtain suitable skills. This is primarily because employers are reluctant to fund training, preferring instead to hire suitably skilled workers and also the cost of self funding training is often prohibitive. Therefore, solo mothers who had recent or up to date skills were more likely find appropriate paid work. This was explained by one solo mother in the current study:

I think it would be easier for me to get a job than someone who didn't have experience in the workforce or hadn't had work in the last six years. I mean I would be able to get a job a lot easier than they would (Joy).

However, there are some opportunities for solo mothers to engage in tertiary education to develop skills and to gain qualifications. Prior to the most recent Welfare to Work reforms, provision was made through the PES to assist solo mothers on PPS (and some other welfare recipients) engage in tertiary study full time, without the requirement to participate in jobseeking activities if study was not undertaken (Cortis, et al., 2008). The PES enabled solo mothers to undertake study to enhance skills, knowledge and to potentially result in leaving welfare to engage in suitable paid employment. For example, Wendy had commenced tertiary study prior to the reforms and so was eligible for continuance of the PES, *"I'm starting to think about a career rather than just a job. And it was the whole reason I went back to uni because I didn't have to do waitressing, I didn't have to do office work. I didn't enjoy it"*.

Although recipients of PPS remain eligible to receive the PES, recipients of NSA are not eligible, unless a course had been commenced prior to transferring. New recipients of NSA (i.e. solo parents newly registered) are not eligible for the PES. A remark made by one solo mother highlighted that the changes to education supplement would affect the ability for some solo mothers to participate in tertiary study to enhance their employment options:

...someone from Centrelink told me 15 hours of study is only for short study courses so I could not go to university. And I don't think that's fair because it means that in the long run it would enable me to have a better paying job which would mean that I would probably be able to come off Centrelink payments...that is really limiting and I find that unfair (Chris).

Work opportunities, particularly in regard to working hours, were foremost in making choices about doing paid work. However, Baker and Tippin (2002) suggested that due to the scarcity of paid part time work within suitable hours for solo mothers,

there is often a trade off and lower income is earned. With the work first focus of the Welfare to Work reforms, and the accompanying compliance framework, it is not surprising that less appropriate paid work options are offered (Guenther, et al., 2008). For the solo mothers in the current study who were not in paid employment, paid work in school hours was most beneficial in terms of balancing work and family. This meant that work between the hours of nine and three was most attractive, but was limited by the type of paid work available. A fear that was expressed on several occasions was that paid work within suitable hours would be more likely to be work that was not enjoyable:

...if you do end up working down at the chicken farm or whatever, because that's what was offered to you, and that's all that was available at the time, if you really, really hate your job, it's not going to be beneficial...it's pointless (Lyn);

I think parents have to lower their standards in what employment they want to do as well. I mean a cleaner can get a job for 15 hours a week but I can't see a lot of parents wanting to be cleaners when that's what they do at home and raise their children. And that also hurts people's pride (Joy).

Working part time and in poorly paid jobs can impact upon a solo mother's financial wellbeing and security in several ways. Saunders (2006) indicated that paid part time work is insufficient to support a family and financial assistance is needed to help families. Further, Branigan and Keebaugh (2005) stated the propensity for solo mothers to do paid part time work can result in loss of opportunity for promotion, adversely affect career prospects, as well as result in potential losses in superannuation opportunities thus threatening a solo mother's future financial security.

While Saunders (2006) insisted that paid part time work is not sufficient to financially sustain and support a family, the type of work undertaken can also be detrimental to an individual's wellbeing. Indeed, Baker (2001) asserted that paid work in itself is not beneficial especially if there is no prospect of advancement and if the work is unskilled and poorly paid. In addition, Burgess and Connell (2005) stated that

casual and part time work is the most common type of paid work available. Casual work in particular has no annual leave or sick leave entitlements, and work can often be terminated without notice, thus being an insecure type of employment. Further, casual work and to some degree, part time work, is often unpredictable in offered paid work hours and may be outside normal working hours (Burgess & Connell, 2005). A positive aspect of casual and part time work though is potential flexibility and so may suit varied lifestyles more readily than full time work.

Flexibility and family friendly practices within the workplace was a major factor in the degree of enjoyment solo mothers had in their paid part time work. Important and appreciated facets of some workplaces were flexible starting times and availability of leave for personal business as well as child minding agreements or arrangements. Flexibility was cited by most of the solo mothers as being one of the most important factors needed for successful paid work and family balance: *“My ideal job would be to be really flexible and to have 3 days a week working and the rest being at home and available for my kids”* (Liz). Some of the mothers were fortunate to have flexible employers, and Jenny explained the flexibility of her employer:

I’m extremely lucky. I work for the government so if I had to take time off because the girls are sick, you can do it. If you apply for leave in school holidays when you have school aged children, if they deny your leave, they’ll pay part of your child care for the children...and I can take leave without pay if I want to.

However, for at least some of the solo mothers interviewed, workplaces were perceived as being inflexible in terms of family friendly practices. Buchanan (2008) also considered that a perception of inequitable treatment may occur in workplaces that have both females and males of equal ability. One participant stated the more senior positions within the workplace were more suited to men who were not solely responsible for children: *“a lot of the people who in the higher positions are men ...and may not have those requirements where they have to be home by 6 o’clock to pick up a*

child” (Anna). Anna also went on to say “*There have been situations where they’ve organised a meeting and I couldn’t attend [because of family commitments]. I’ve been criticised and it affects you career wise*”. Indeed Sheen (2008) alleged many women can be discriminated against in the paid workforce because of mothers’ caring responsibilities.

Supports

Supporting children.

The defined parenting role underpinned many of the choices made by the solo mothers in the current study. While providing materially for children was considered important “*provide for my children, to provide a roof over their head, to feed them, to clothe them...*” (Joy), guiding children through life to become mature adults was a frequent definition of the parenting role. This was further explained as teaching children acceptable behaviour: “*For me, parenting is I guess, it’s really, just bringing up the children so they’re happy and well balanced and they know what’s right and wrong...and for them to be able to grow really*” (Mary). Indeed, the parenting role is recognised as being the blueprint for emotional regulation, behaviour and socialisation of children (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers & Robinson, 2007).

The solo mothers in the current study also supported their children by being available to them. This took the form of being on call for whatever circumstances arose “*if something comes up at school, I need to have the freedom to go down to the school and deal with that issue*” (Wendy). Some of the mothers stated working in paid employment interfered with the parenting role “*I don’t think you should have to [work] because you need to be available to look after your kids and you can’t do that if you’re at work*” (Grace).

Role modelling emerged as an essential component of supporting children to emotionally and socially develop and provide them with the necessary skills and

behaviours to cope in society. While the solo mothers were the main role models for their children, some of the children had frequent contact with the father. Although for some, parenting styles had been consistent while parents were together, conflict often interfered with parenting consistency. For example Maria said, *“well both the children’s father and myself have tried to be really good role models for the children and when we were together we were basically on the same page in terms of our parenting styles. That’s no longer the case unfortunately”*. However, regardless of the conflict in parenting, role modelling was important in parenting *“a role model for them becoming worthy citizens in the community”* (Liz) and *“it’s [parenting] the role of mentorship I suppose. I guess you include morals, ethics, things like that”* (Lucy).

The solo mothers in the current study, who did paid work, prided themselves as being good role models for their children:

I think the satisfaction and teaching the children that living on welfare is not what it’s there for. Primarily, it’s there if you need it, you get an education, you go to university if you’re clever enough, you get a job that’s going to pay well. You know if you talk to my kids, that’s what they say! And that’s really important to us. So I suppose, working and getting that satisfaction, you know that pride of saying that ‘Mummy does this, this is what my Mummy does’...They love coming into work with me, they love, because I work out near the airport, they love seeing the planes land and all that sort of stuff. They think that’s really great. So to take them in and being able to show them, this is what Mum does (Mary).

It was particularly important for one solo mother about to enter into full time paid work, to be a positive role model for her daughter

I think it’s important that my children, especially my daughter...I think it’s important that she sees that women have many roles in life and so they’re actually seeing that Mum’s a single parent and working and trying to do the best

she can. Hopefully it will help to instil in them good values
(Maria).

Lindbeck and Nyberg (2006) recognised the importance of role modelling by parents in terms of engaging in paid work. Lindbeck and Nyberg suggested that if parents make working for income the norm, it is more likely that the children will also have a work ethic. However, if parents are disinclined to do paid work and rely on welfare payments, it is less likely the children will engage in work (Lindbeck & Nyberg, 2006). Lack of a male role model for the children was a concern for some of the solo mothers. Some children had very little or in some cases, no contact with their father. Of the fifteen mothers interviewed, only five of the women had ex-partners who had regular contact with their child/children and all 15 solo mothers had majority care and responsibility of the children. In some instances, surrogate male role models were found in male relatives and friends:

I'm leaving [town] because I've got my brother. He's great with kids and the children will get a male role model who is available constantly on a daily basis. They have got a father but unfortunately he's not been inclined to give them a lot of time...they've been missing out on a male role model (Lyn).

Sarkadi et al. (2007) reported that regular father or father-figure engagement with children had a positive effect on cognitive and behavioural development. However, Sarkadi and colleagues also indicated that fathers who lived within the family home were more likely to be effectively engaged. Nevertheless, Dubowitz, Black, Cox, et al. (2001) maintained that a father figure who was actively involved in a positive way, regardless of residence, had a beneficial effect on their overall development.

Self care was mentioned as being essential in being able to care for, and support children. Jenny stated that to be able to parent effectively “*you do need time for yourself. You need to look after yourself*”. However, lack of time out was also a source of stress for some of the solo mothers “*Not getting a break. That's pretty difficult sometimes when you're really, really hanging out from the time they go to school*”

(Lyn). Lack of support from a partner also made it difficult to practice self care and ultimately the children were more likely to be affected:

It's definitely challenging because you never get a break, because you don't have anyone to take over when you're tired or unwell or stressed or just had a bad day...If I'm sick I don't have someone to look after my kids. They end up having to look after themselves (Chris).

Additionally, there was evidence that some mothers experienced ongoing stress in terms of having no time for self care:

I have to work and on top of working you've still got your work at home. Like you can't just come home and relax or sit down and play with the kids. You've got to come home and get dinner done, get the washing off the line, fold the washing, cook dinner, wash the dishes. You know, all that sort of thing. So there's never much time (Rita).

Indeed, Hodgson et al. (2001) suggested that solo mothers have a feeling of unrelenting responsibility to their children, often forgoing personal needs. Ongoing stress resulting from lack of personal time also affected family relationships for one mother “*I also don't have any free time myself so what happens is that I become quite stressed after work so that I interact with my children sometimes in a very negative way. It's difficult*” (Anna).

However, Hodgson et al. (2001) also considered that weekend time spent with the children was precious and important. For Anna, weekends were considered as being the time most favourably spent with the children “*I spend all weekend chauffeuring back and forth and putting a lot of effort into them [children] so the weekend is family time because it's really the only time I have with them*”.

Supporting children was considered one of the paramount concerns for the mothers in this study. The ways in which children were supported included parental guidance, emotional and physical availability, and positive role modelling. Of great concern also was the ability for mothers to practice self care. For many, time pressure produced a very real challenge for taking time out to relax or have personal time.

Receiving financial support.

Finances were a featured concern for all of the mothers in the current study. Indeed, solo mothers are one group within Australia most likely to experience some level of financial stress (Saunders, Hill & Bradbury, 2008). While some solo mothers were financially more independent than others, the concern that finances were precarious was ever present for all mothers. Payne (2009) indicated employment was not necessarily a route out of financial stress and the numbers of working poor were increasing.

Financial support for the solo mothers in the current study came from different sources. For at least eight of the solo mothers interviewed, income was derived primarily from payments from Centrelink in the form of PPS or DSP. Receipt of PPS or DSP was necessary for survival but in many instances, the amount was inadequate to fully meet the individual needs of some of the mothers. For example, Fran stated “*The majority of us are existing hand to mouth week to week*” and changes made to levels of payment could drastically affect how money was used:

The level of payment changes without any notification and so I'm literally budgeting my family budget to the dollar. And so when changes are made, I'm pretty well blown out of the water...we get a letter to say what our entitlements and things are but like when my youngest child turned five or six just even that \$40 a fortnight came out, totally impacted on my family budget (Maria).

The introduction of NSA payments for those parents seeking assistance after July 2006 and whose youngest child was over the age of eight years, was considered to be unfair by many of the solo mothers in this study. Specifically, some solo mothers were upset that the amount of assistance should decrease as a child got older:

I think it's unfair. Because it doesn't take into account the additional costs of raising children as opposed to just seeking work. And I think the payments in the Centrelink system are woefully inadequate for you know, ordinary families to survive these days. Particularly in a climate of rising rents and costs of food. You know I tried to live on a Centrelink NSA payment myself for a couple of months and it's just very difficult (Liz).

According to ACOSS (2005) the transfer to NSA would make it even more difficult for solo mothers to look for paid work as it would limit the ability to pay for transport and acquire suitable skills. Further, the compulsion to obtain paid work would be unaffected by the lowering of welfare amounts through NSA (ACOSS, 2005).

Despite ongoing changes to the Child Support system, some solo mothers in this study did not receive any assistance from the children's father, thus adding to the potential for financial disadvantage. Many of these mothers acknowledged the strain the absence of child support put upon their financial situation, "*When there's only one person and the fact that I don't get child support, any help with money at all...because there's only one person. With two we had a wage coming in so we could balance things a bit more*" (Lyn). However, adjustments were made in some instances to make up for the lack of financial support from the father:

I have to work full time because if I don't work full time where's the money coming from? I don't get any financial support from her father so if I don't work, what are we going to live on? (Lucy).

Even now, with changes to the Child Support system attempting to provide more equitable outcomes for both the non-resident and resident parent, the resident parent (usually the mother) often remains financially disadvantaged (Smyth & Henman, 2010). Only seven of the 15 solo mothers interviewed received more than the minimum amount of child support payments. Indeed, the House Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs (2003) indicated that 41 per cent of solo parents did not receive any child support. However, the changes have aimed to reduce disincentives for non-

resident parents to engage in the paid workforce to provide support for children by taking into account the amount of time spent with the children and other extra support is provided (Smyth & Henman, 2010).

The combination of lack of child support payments from fathers and the meagre amount of PPS or DSP appeared to accentuate the financial stress experienced within some of the solo mother headed families. Indeed several of the solo mothers interviewed told of having to borrow money to enable them to give Christmas presents to their children:

Financially I'm pushing it each fortnight. At the moment I've just had to ask my girlfriend for a loan so I can get my kids Christmas presents. I just cannot afford Christmas this year. Foodwise the same thing. I just make ends meet (Ellen).

However, as Saunders and Adelman (2006) assert, financial stress is not just about the lack of money, but is more multidimensional, leading to social exclusion and deprivation. Certainly, reliance upon welfare payments as the main source of income appeared to be related to extreme hardship, and as such could be considered as confirmation of concerns regarding social exclusion and deprivation raised by the RGWR.

Financial support was crucial for all of the solo mothers in the current study. Solo mothers who received PPS as the main income, and who did not receive any child support from the father appeared to be the most vulnerable. Some solo mothers were dependent upon family members and friends to ease the financial burden at times or frequently had to prioritise basic spending. Solo mothers in private rental were also at the mercy of rising rents without a corresponding raise in PPS or rental assistance.

Practical and emotional support.

Although financial support was very important to the solo mothers, practical and emotional support also helped to ease the stress of parenting alone. Friends were

particularly supportive especially for solo mothers who were required to do paid work during school holidays or after school hours. For example Liz explained:

I do have a network of friends who, you know, we swap play dates and things like that and often during the school holidays as I was working full time over the last three months. I had the ability to ring up a friend to see if she could have [child] for this day or can she come and play with your child whilst I'm at work. So it's having this network of friends and having people support you that is quite important in the community.

Even though Liz found her friends very supportive, the same was not true of her own family “*I have family close by but...it's not a regular thing [support]...it's been a bit of a sore point being a solo parent anyway, so I don't get a lot of support from the family*”. Similar experiences were reported by the participants in Webber and Boromeo's (2005) study of supports for solo parents following divorce or death of a spouse. However, some of the participants in Webber and Boromeo's study also indicated that friends had declined following divorce. Indeed, Wendy opined “*...you know it's bad enough that you lose half of your friends. Because when you're in a couple you know, half of your friends are the partners of your partner's friends*”. Alice indicated that she was reluctant to have close friends and preferred self-reliance: “*Who supports me? I support myself. I have a couple of friends but I only allow them so far. I don't have many close friends*”.

Other parents, both solo and couple, were also considered emotionally supportive:

Other single parents are a terrific source of inspiration and support. Good friends, not just single friends but married friends as well because they can give you perspective...so you know whether yours [children] are out of whack or not
(Fran).

However, friends and family were sometimes a source of irritation “*Well meaning friends, well meaning family who don't know when to support but also don't know when to back off as well*” (Alice). This paradox is consistent with experiences of

solo mothers in Webber and Boromeo's (2005) study who considered that friends and family often offered support but only according to personal values rather than the particular needs of the solo mother. This was viewed as more of an imposition than support.

Support within the workplace was valued highly by some solo mothers in the paid workforce. Workplaces were supportive in more practical ways such as offering flexible work hours and conditions. For example following the birth of her son, Joy's employer was extremely flexible:

I went straight back to work after [son] was two weeks old and I took [son] to work with me. I had a great boss, he said he could come to work with me...and he set me up at home as well so I could work from home for him and things like that...he was a very unusual man.

Gray and Tudball (2002) and Millar and Ridge (2008), indicating the importance of flexible and family friendly work places to support solo mothers doing paid work. Mary compared her current employer who was supportive of working mothers with previous employers:

...doing what I'm doing you know, they pay me if my children are sick. They look after me, whereas hairdressing I lost two jobs because I had my children in hospital and I couldn't work....You know, that precise time when you've got children in hospital sick, you can't go to work, you stay with your children. And that's really unfair, if you're working casually, you've got no comeback.

Work colleagues were often cited as being supportive. For one mother, although she was very self-reliant, work colleagues were considered to be an invaluable source of support:

My work colleagues...I have the support of my work colleagues. Like when I got rushed to hospital to have an operation, my work colleagues actually took my children home to look after them until the ex could come over and get them (Alice).

Other solo mothers found their work colleagues to be empathic of the challenges faced as a solo mother:

...like everyone at work is really good. And there's quite a few parents at work who really feel for single mothers. They go, 'oh my god it's hard enough working with kids when you've got a partner but I can't imagine what it's like as a single parent' (Jenny).

Mary also considered the positive nature of making new friends through engaging in paid work: *"obviously the social side. I talk to people all day and there have been some great friendships that I've made through work...just interacting having a laugh. Sort of bettering myself as well".*

Practical support such as job skills training was considered vital by some participants in the current study to assist solo mothers return to the paid workforce. While many of the solo mothers interviewed had worked for pay prior to having children, some of them found their job skills were limited, were outdated or in some circumstances, illness prevented working in the area of previous paid work. For example, Grace was a hairdresser by trade, however was unable to continue as a hairdresser because of a chronic condition affecting coordination. Grace stated *"I want to see if they'll retrain me to do something else"* so that she could fulfil the participation requirements to continue receiving PPS. Although training was considered to be an important factor for some of the solo mothers who would be expected to engage in job related activities, Guenther, Falk, and Arnott (2008) cautioned that training that was offered was more likely to be short term with an emphasis on paid work as the Welfare to Work reforms had a work first focus.

Power

Patriarchal government.

The majority of politicians and powerful decision makers in Australia are men, although this gendered power imbalance is slowly changing. In contrast, the majority of

solo parents in Australia are mothers and much of child care is still considered the domain of women. However, despite the child caring role to be primarily the domain of women, expectations of the Australian government are that mothers should contribute to the economy through paid employment. For many solo mothers in the current study, the expectation that women would contribute directly to Australia's economy was met with fear as mothers struggled with commitment to family and financial hardship.

However, participation in the paid workforce in return for financial assistance was promoted by the RGWR (2000) as beneficial for individuals, families and communities. Carney (2007) disagreed and described the Welfare to Work reforms as competitive and authoritarian, instilling a work-first mentality that is coercive. He further argued that Welfare to Work reforms may be detrimental as welfare recipients, including solo parents, are expected to do paid work regardless of individual choices and often without optimum support. This expectation was further described by one of the mothers in the current study:

I think they're totally unfair [Welfare to Work reforms], it's a very paternalistic top down. The policies are insidious. There are marginalised groups that are even more stigmatised against. And I get quite irate that they could pull the welfare benefits back from those who are vulnerable and needy in our society and yet spend money on things that the average Australian wouldn't choose in a pink fit, as a national priority. It just doesn't wash with me (Maria).

However, fairness is an subjective perception and depends upon expectations, social interactions and personal values (Tyler, 2000). For example, Rita summarised two opposing perceptions:

In one sense it's fair [work participation for PPS] because the Australian government has been pretty good in looking after people, but in another sense the single parent is already working at home...you're asking a person to go out and do an extra 15 hours of work on top of all the hours of work that they put in at home with no help. So in that sense it's unfair but in the other sense it's fair.

The punitive nature of compliance measures was also a concern for some mothers as it was for lobby groups such as NCSMC and ACOSS. A main concern stated by ACOSS (2005), was that payments could be withdrawn for people most in need. Further, ACOSS also identified compliance measures did not assist people into paid work but rather added to the barriers already in place. Although the compliance measures were mostly deemed punitive, some solo mothers had the opinion that “*Yeah, I think there has to be something in place to scare people into doing it otherwise no-one’s going to do it*” (Joy). An opposing argument was:

I don’t think they [Centrelink] should take your money off you if you can’t do it. What is that proving? It’s just going backwards, it’s making people poorer than they already are (Grace).

Carney (2006) suggested that the new compliance framework introduced as part of the Welfare to Work reforms were just an updated version of the breaching system previously utilised by Centrelink to enforce participation. Interestingly though, Barrett and Clarke’s (2001) review of a randomised trial of compelling PPS and NSA recipients to undertake jobs, education and training (JET) interviews found that compelling recipients to complete the interviews was more likely to result in increased employment participation.

The power of the patriarchal government of Australia was considered by most of the solo mothers to be unavoidable and irrevocable. Decisions made by the government were perceived as unjust insofar as consultation had not been sought within the current study’s solo mothers’ peer groups. The degree of trust in benevolence of the government appeared to be minimal and there were continual overtones that the government lacked empathy for the vulnerable people who are governed.

Lack of empathy.

Linked to the power differential between the Federal Government and people receiving welfare payments, was a perceived lack of empathy by the government and

agencies such as Centrelink, regarding the particular challenges and circumstances many solo mothers experienced. The gender imbalance in parliament and, more particularly, the absence of solo parents in a position of power, was considered a contributing factor to the perceived lack of empathy shown by government. Regardless of whether the solo mother had no income apart from PPS or if she was taking home a full time wage packet, lack of empathy was perceived by most of the solo mothers who were interviewed. For example, Chris who was a solo mother reliant on PPS at the time made the statement *"I'd like for Johnny Howard to come spend a week in my shoes...You know, see how he likes them apples"*. Similar statements were also made by two solo mothers who did full time paid work:

...[the politicians should] try living as a single parent themselves. Honestly, to take home the same wages as we do and see if they can live like that for a month...I mean I think the fairest way to make any decisions is to live like one of us (Rita).

They [politicians] can walk around the street and talk to as many people as they like but they don't know what it's like for day to day, week to week, year to year. There's no empathy, there's no knowledge there (Lucy).

While most of the comments regarding lack of empathy related to the government, some of the solo mothers recounted their feelings of being bullied by Centrelink regarding payment of PPS:

I do object to Centrelink being...they bully people in their letters you know. They're quite threatening in the way they put forward things. I do find that offensive. For me, I've pretty much always complied. I've always worked...I'm not someone who spends my pension down at the pub or the casino (Chris).

Having these people [Centrelink] question these things about me [relationships with people Wendy sharing house with], I thought what right do they have to question that? And I didn't realise that it takes away your sense of independence... And I don't want to have to justify every move I make. But they expect a lot (Wendy).

However, one solo mother found Centrelink to be a helpful agency in terms of assisting to manage the budget

My electricity and phone all automatically comes out – Centrelink pays it to them. So I don't actually – when I get my bill I'm always in credit. And you don't get charged bank service fees and that's really eased a lot for me rather than how it used to be before – just wait for the bills to come in (Lyn).

Similar to Lyn's assertion that "*I know Centrelink does Centrepay which is great. I use it. But not everybody knows about it*", knowledge of many other services provided by Centrelink and referrals to services were not generally well known. Rather, Centrelink was primarily recognised as the overseer of distributing PPS and other social security payments, while ensuring compliance with participation rules "*I'm so worried I'm going to end up in some crap job just to shut Centrelink up while I'm still in the middle of things [studying]*" (Wendy).

The perceived lack of empathy appeared to influence how the solo mothers felt about the fairness of the decisions made regarding the Welfare to Work reforms. Comments indicated that decisions made were not fair and there was a sense of disempowerment throughout the interviews when solo mothers were talking about how decisions were made that potentially affected them. Although one solo mother spoke about having a voice regarding decisions made "*Well, I can vote. I can have a voice. I can vote. And you know if I had time, which I don't, I could lobby my local MP [Minister of Parliament]*" (Lucy), most of the solo mothers felt their voice was not heard: "*There seems to be nothing much you can do about things like that [reforms]. Because it doesn't matter if you raise your voice about it, the government does what it likes*" (Rita); "*There's nothing you can do about it [reforms] so there's no point in feeling anything about it*" (Grace). Comments about lack of control over reforms made by the government indicated a belief in an unjust world and external locus of control (Appelbaum et al., 2003).

Indeed there was a strong feeling among the solo parents interviewed that perhaps solo parents had not been consulted at all about proposed welfare reforms “*I wonder how many single parents were asked to contribute or give their opinions to these changes*” (Maria). Studies regarding procedural fairness indicate that outcomes are more readily accepted if the procedures used have been judged to be fair (Tyler, 2000). Further, Tyler (1994) suggested that perceived procedural fairness or lack thereof, influenced how individuals evaluate those in authority. Chris elaborated further and clarified the link between empathy and fairness of the decisions:

I don't really know how they went about it, I know they didn't consult me or anyone else [I know]. It does really feel a little bit like...they're men who probably don't know anything about single parenting for a start, let alone know what it's like being a woman doing single parenting...they're from a different generation [politicians] sitting up there in Canberra...It seemed to come up very suddenly... [As if the politicians had said] 'We've decided they [solo parents] need to go back to work' you know, 'there's a skills shortage and we need people to go back to work'. That's just how it felt.

Even though decision makers' lack of empathy perceived by many of the solo mothers was upsetting and disempowering, at least two of the solo mothers were positively motivated to rely more on personal strengths, thus demonstrating an internal locus of control. “*You can't rely on the government...You've really got to rely on yourself. Well that's what I'm going to do anyway*” (Joy); “*I guess at the end of the day, we all create our own future. I guess we can only use the help that's on offer and hopefully use it wisely*” (Mary). Further, at least one solo mother had higher expectations of the standard of living for her own family and so was reluctant to rely on welfare, “*I'm an intelligent person; I'm educated so it doesn't interest me sitting at home, doing nothing on virtually no money at all. I've got higher aspirations for myself and my family*” (Lucy).

Values and Mixed Messages

Family structure and parenting.

A complex theme that emerged from the interviews was that of values and mixed messages. The typical family structure within Australia has traditionally been that of a nuclear family comprising a mother and father and children. Over time, due to immigration policies, extended families that included grandparents also became common. Since 1975 the number of solo parent families has also markedly risen. The majority of solo parent families though are mostly headed by women. Possible reasons for the great increase in the number of solo mother families are the introduction of no fault divorce, greater opportunities for women with children to do paid work and equal opportunity legislation that aims to prevent discrimination against women in the paid workforce.

Even though the sample of solo mothers in the current study were heterogeneous in terms of income, ability and reliance upon welfare, a perception that solo parent families were less valued by the Australian government was prevalent. From July 2006, solo mothers were targeted to participate in the paid workforce once the youngest child reached six years of age. Further, once the youngest child of a solo parent reached eight years of age, the parent would be recognised as a jobseeker first and foremost rather than a parent and be transferred to the lower payment of NSA. This perception was summed up by a number of solo mothers who spoke about the introduction of NSA for new recipients of social security:

I feel it quite threatening [NSA]. Like if you don't, what is going to happen? Especially when, you could even end up having to go down to the church and 'can I have a parcel of food please? I've got no money'. Got no money to buy food for the kids. And the fact is that will happen for a lot of people. They've had their money cut. I can understand the whole ideal of getting the country back to work but you know I don't really think that there's that many when you look at the population there's not that many single mums who are home, completely at home. A lot of us work and study (Lyn.).

I don't think they [solo parents eligible for NSA] should be treated any different to people who already have children. No, because I think the parenting payment is as low as it can get really. Um, particularly for people who have more than one child. I think if you have only one child but as soon as you have two kids it throws the balance right out. Um, and to get less than that would be catastrophic. I think you're going to end up finding that more people end up needing social housing rather than being able to afford their own housing and things like that. They're going to end up needing more in terms of social services for clothing and food and things like that because there just won't be enough (Chris).

That's not fair at all [changing from PPS to NSA]. Um, and also because the cost of living has escalated. So that it's not only a straight reduction factor, it's the cost of living ...it's insufficient with that amount. I know because I've been on the parenting payment and you struggle as it is let alone with that (Anna).

The introduction of NSA raised questions of equity, discrimination and valuing parenthood. Alice became quite angry about the introduction of NSA and raised the issues of discrimination and devaluing of parenthood:

Why do they [parents new to welfare system] have to go onto NSA for? Why is it that they are suddenly not a parent? That they're not entitled to parenting allowance? Are they no longer a parent? Aren't they in the same regulations? Why do they have to change it that way? That's my point. People who have the same criteria but they're not being treated the same....they've got to look at - everybody needs to be treated the same.

Some policies, although aimed at encouraging and increasing birth rates, were perceived to be irresponsible. The Howard government appeared to have conflicting policies by encouraging an increase in the birth rate through incentives such as the baby bonus, but also demanding solo parents engage in the paid workforce while their children are still young (Payne, 2009). The baby bonus rewarded parents with a one-off payment to encourage mothers to stay home and care for the child. Indeed the introduction of this particular policy was a puzzle to at least one of the mothers:

I think that giving this huge baby bonus to teenagers is sending completely mixed messages. Like, go and get pregnant, have a baby, we'll give you this huge amount of money...you know when you're at school it's a lot of money. You know that is one of the craziest ideas I can imagine, just to repopulate. I mean the intelligence of that 17 year old to get that money is going to breed a child who is probably going to follow in those footsteps and they probably will be locked into the welfare cycle (Mary).

According to many of the solo mothers, nuclear families were more valued by the Federal Government than were solo parent families. “We [solo parents] actually are assets because we're trying to bring up the next generation. I'm sick of feeling like a liability” (Wendy). Anna was expressed concern about the perceived societal attitudes towards solo parent families:

Society still thinks that people should be in couples and you know I don't think that is the issue in parenting...the family structure doesn't have to be nuclear family and we shouldn't be excommunicated because we don't fit into the traditional structure...there are lots of different structures which are equally as good in terms of parenting and developing the child (Anna).

Anna suggested there was a perception in society of solo parent families being harmful for children:

I guess my concern is that there's a lot of negativity associated with single parents and considered as being a bad person and failed in society. And I guess the worst part is that every time I go to a barbecue the first thing is 'oh, you don't have a partner, she doesn't have a father, isn't that bad for her?'

You only matter to the government if you are part of a married couple family. If you're a single mother, neither you nor your children are as valuable. You don't contribute to society if you are a stay at home mother...being a mother in itself is not valued at all. It's not placed in perspective as a job. It's just written off as a liability and not the enormous asset it is (Fran).

Stereotypes.

Mothers in the current study perceived society in general held negative stereotypes regarding solo mothers. Some stereotypes were seen to have been developed as a result of media influence, particularly programs that had a quasi legitimate research basis. According to Mann (2008), it is not unusual for the media to reinforce negative stereotypes, thus encouraging social exclusion. Without exception, each of the stereotypes regarding solo mothers was negative in connotation:

We tend to be looked down upon, as lesser beings, we're not their social equals, we're a threat to their married status, in that they're quite ready to view us as ready to target their husbands...it's just a judgement that's based on a lot of media and government stereotypes I think (Fran).

Both my kids go to scouts and a few weeks ago we were all sitting around and chatting and somebody said something derogatory about single mothers and I just had to go 'stop right there, I'm a single mother' and you know, they were like, 'oh yeah, we forgot'. And you know that was in my own kind of group...people I mix with (Mary).

I used to feel guilty being on a pension but I don't anymore, because that's what it's there for, the people who need it (Jenny).

A comment by Wendy suggested solo fathers were perceived as socially more accepted and therefore more deserving than solo mothers:

You know if I start looking at the way single mums are portrayed [in the media] compared to single dads, you know, single dads are brilliant men, they're like heroes. They're somehow taking on this amazing role that women have been doing for decades and we're [solo mothers] somehow decadent because of it [being solo mothers] or less like normal women, you know. Just – like it's normal, it's like, it's ok to have these attitudes towards single mums.

Mann (2008) asserted solo mothers and their children have for some time been the focus of welfare changes and are frequently classified and monitored by organisations such as Centrelink. Continued focus on solo mothers as primarily welfare

dependents promotes high visibility. However, the dialogue is not often that of the solo mothers but of the media, politicians and academics. This can lead to a skewed perception and increased marginalisation and stereotyping (Mann, 2008).

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Choices

The circumstances surrounding how each participant became a solo mother varied with some widowed, others choosing solo motherhood and also as a result of separation or divorce. However, the majority of the solo mothers had not chosen to parent alone. Domestic violence was also a factor for some of the women in the current study.

Parenting alone was difficult for the solo mothers and such routine tasks as making day to day decisions were regarded by some of the mothers as “double edged swords”. While making decisions alone was considered as one of the “perks” of solo parenthood, it was also the time when some of the mothers missed having a partner the most. Solo mothers who had teenage children (especially sons) indicated difficulties of parenting effectively without the support of the child’s father. Taking full responsibility of day to day care of children was also considered to be emotionally and physically exhausting with little personal time.

A frequent concern by the solo mothers was the lack of choice in providing any “extras” for the children such as excursions, sports, music or other interests. Some women reported choosing to go without necessities, such as personal medications and frequently borrowing money to pay for bills or for Christmas presents. The solo mothers who did not receive any child support or only received the minimum amount reported to have been the most adversely affected financially.

The choice to do paid work or be a “stay-at-home parent” was perceived as taken away by the necessity to work to provide for the family and to comply with

welfare participation rules. Although some of the solo mothers were willing to do paid work, many of them disclosed a fear of not having recent skills for the workforce. Added to this fear was concern that the only jobs open to them would be low paying unskilled jobs that would not job satisfaction or sufficient income. Further, the jobs that would enable them to combine work and family responsibilities were scarce and child care was also required.

Supports

Supportive friends and family were regarded as essential in helping the solo mothers in the current study manage paid work and family. Few of the solo mothers had supportive ex-partners. Flexible workplaces and supportive co-workers were valued by the solo mothers who had been fortunate to obtain paid work that suited their needs in this way. Support in caring for children was also highly valued, however this was at times difficult to obtain as child care centres had rigid hours of business, were expensive, and family members and friends were unable to commit to regular caring.

Financial support was considered paramount, however the support provided through PPS, NSA or DSP was often not sufficient for the needs of the solo mothers and children. Lack of child support from the fathers of the children, further made a negative impact upon the solo mothers' ability to provide for herself and her children. A number of the mothers were incensed with the ineligibility for solo parents with the youngest child aged over eight years and applying for welfare and being offered NSA rather than PPS. This was seen as unfair given the costs of children invariably rise as the child grows older.

Power

The changes to the welfare system were criticised by the majority of the solo mothers, although some claimed an understanding of the need for solo mothers to contribute to the paid workforce. Nevertheless, the changes were touted as unfair and

lacking empathy with the circumstances of solo mothers. There was a perception by many that the Federal Government held all power and solo parents were at the mercy of the government and left with no choice regarding parenting and paid work. There was also a sense of lack of trust in the Federal Government's fairness in decision making as it affected solo parents. Further, many of the mothers in the current study considered their role as a parent and mother to be devalued by the changes to the welfare system.

The compliance framework attached to the mutual obligation proposed by the Welfare to Work reforms was met with disapproval by the majority of the solo mothers who were interviewed. The compliance framework was considered too punitive and unfair by solo mothers, particularly in light of the challenges faced in looking for and obtaining paid work. However, at least one solo mother alluded to the practicality of enforcing compliance in order to achieve the best outcomes.

The administration of welfare payments through Centrelink was criticised by several of the mothers with reports of bullying letters, inflexibility, coercion and invasion of privacy, particularly in terms of relationships. However, there was also a sense of appreciation of the role Centrelink could play in helping some of the solo mothers with managing bill payments and providing welfare payments.

Values and Mixed Messages

Stereotypes held about solo mothers were mentioned several times during interviews. Whilst most interviewees acknowledged that the social views of solo mothers were perpetuated by media, participants spoke of being subject to remarks that hurt and devalued their role as a parent. Some mothers also disclosed feeling like a liability in the eyes of the Federal Government with a perception that nuclear families were consistently favoured over solo parent headed families.

The following chapter discusses the results and findings of both parts of the current study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the construction of wellbeing for solo mothers.

Chapter Nine

Overall Discussion

The aim of the current study was to explore the construction of wellbeing of solo mothers and the relationship that may exist between work, welfare, social justice and wellbeing for this particular group. As noted previously, solo mothers are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australia and for the solo mothers in the current study, the level of subjective wellbeing experienced is significantly lower than that for the general population. Factors influencing lower levels of subjective wellbeing were identified as income, work related skills, support, flexible work places, friendships and relationships, social inclusion, and stigma/stereotyping. Further, level of trust in government and perceived fairness of decision making and allocation of resources appeared to have an effect on the level of subjective wellbeing. This chapter will examine the results and findings of parts one and two of the current study, identify factors that contribute to the construction of subjective wellbeing for solo mothers, and discuss the findings in light of the body of literature surrounding wellbeing and solo mothers.

As a group, solo parents suffer psychological distress (Avison et al., 2007) and have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing than the normative population (Cummins, 2006). This has been supported by the results of the quantitative part of the current study. It is important to realise though, there are always exceptions, and even in the current study, there were individual scores on the PWI that indicated levels of subjective wellbeing within the normative range and higher for some solo mothers. However, the mean of scores on the PWI in the current study was statistically significantly lower than the mean for the normative population. Whilst this may not be surprising, given the ample research indicating solo mothers to be among one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australia, the way in which solo mothers construct their wellbeing on a backdrop of welfare reform and social justice required further investigation. In order to examine the construction of wellbeing for solo mothers in the circumstances, a mixed methods approach was utilised in the current study.

Income was identified as predicting the level of wellbeing experienced by the solo mothers in the current study. Further, the level of income seemed to mediate how satisfied the solo mothers in the current study were with their standard of living, achievements, sense of safety and future security. Cummins (2008) indicated that even small increases in income could result in substantial improvement in subjective wellbeing. This phenomenon was evident in the current study with a significant increase in subjective wellbeing for solo mothers earning between \$650 and \$799 per week compared to those solo mothers who had incomes of less than \$650 per week.

De Vaus et al. (2009) found that the income of most solo mothers post divorce, was frequently less than prior to divorce. The reason for the drop in income may be connected to the loss of a second income, which is not compensated for adequately by child support payments. Another reason identified by the solo mothers in the current study included a lack of skills with which to enter the paid workforce if previously not

in paid employment, thereby not being able to attract a high paying job. Bojer (2002) also commented on the likelihood that solo parents post divorce may have fewer vocational skills than women who have always been in the paid workforce. Bojer stated this can compromise productivity and application for skilled and more highly paid work. Similar to assertions by Brown and Joyce (2007), further restrictions on paid work hours due to caring responsibilities were considered as a barrier to obtaining suitable work and reasonable income. Although McCartney et al. (2007) suggested rebates made child care much more affordable, costs associated with child care were reported by some solo mothers in the current study as potentially making paid work less profitable. Indeed, Baker (2008) argued child care costs put a strain on the budgets of solo parent families even with rebates. Recent announcements in the Federal Budget for 2011-2012 indicated child care rebates would be increased and could be claimed on a fortnightly basis, thus making child care more affordable for solo mothers (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). See Appendix L for a summary of changes proposed in the Federal Budget for 2011-2012.

Although education has previously been identified as a possible predictor for increased wellbeing (see Ahrens & Ryff, 2006) it did not have statistical significance for the solo mothers in the current study. Certainly, tertiary educated solo mothers in the paid workforce who were interviewed did not express having any greater satisfaction or allude to greater wellbeing. However, it was conceded by the mothers with tertiary education, that paid work was easier to obtain. Regardless, comments by the tertiary educated solo mothers in the current study regarding the difficulty in balancing paid work and family life indicated some distress with their circumstances and although more likely to have better paying jobs, the trade-off was for less family time and often less flexibility.

Many of the solo mothers in the current study were reliant on welfare payments such as PPS and DSP. According to Butterworth et al. (2006) reliance upon welfare payments is linked to low socioeconomic status, poor social support, and poor health, which may also be linked to lower subjective wellbeing.

At the time of interviewing, the majority of solo mothers had been receiving welfare payments prior to the welfare reforms. Only one mother had not been eligible for PPS and received NSA for a short while. There were also some solo mothers earning enough to be ineligible for any welfare payments. The solo mothers who were interviewed and eligible for welfare payments, disclosed payments were necessary for them to survive from week to week. There were numerous concerns that NSA would be exceptionally difficult to survive on, especially if there was more than one child. Similar concerns were voiced by ACOSS (2005) and NCSMC (2005) when the welfare reforms were announced. With more than \$100 less with NSA payments per fortnight compared to PPS, this was perceived as a significant difference, especially given the increasing expenses related to growing children. It appears that the Federal Government has listened to the voices of representatives for solo parents and changes announced in the 2011-2012 Federal Budget stated the taper off for NSA payments would be more in line with the taper off for PPS payments (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Nevertheless, NSA payments would remain substantially less than that for PPS, still raising concern of the equality of welfare payments for solo mothers.

The main benefit of paid work was identified by participants in the qualitative part of the study, as income. This finding is in accordance with research conducted by Cummins and colleagues as part of the series of surveys undertaken to measure subjective wellbeing of Australians (Cummins et al., 2008). The periodical surveys undertaken by Cummins and his team have invariably indicated the rise of subjective wellbeing as income increases. Certainly, income for solo mothers and their children

determines any luxuries that can be afforded. In some cases the attainability of essentials is also governed by income and management of available funds. Some participants disclosed not having been able to manage to buy essential items, such as medications or food at times because of lack of funds. Such financial hardship and deprivation is common for solo mothers (Saunders & Adelman, 2006). Thus, income as a by-product of work could be considered of paramount importance for day to day living.

The emphasis on paid work as necessary for self esteem and wellbeing as suggested by the RGWR (2000) provided a rationale for examining the relationship between paid work and wellbeing for solo mothers. Cook (2005) also suggested self esteem was at risk for solo mothers due to the stigmatisation of solo mothers' reliance on welfare perpetuated by media. While the quantitative results suggested there was not a clear relationship between paid work and wellbeing, many of the solo mothers in the current study told stories of enjoying working for pay and the social interactions it afforded. Similar to observations by Burgess and Strachan (2005) and Callister (2005) there was also a sense of role conflict for those mothers who believed it to be the "right thing" to do and/or had expected to be able to stay at home to raise the children. In essence, it appeared that paid work was important for the benefits and certainly those solo mothers who had always worked for pay reported to have been able to continue to do so without major distraction. The solo mothers who had previously been stay-at-home mothers spoke of concerns surrounding their skill levels and confidence entering the paid workforce. This was also identified by Angleton (2005) as an issue that needed to be addressed. Nonetheless, the majority of solo mothers in the current study disclosed a willingness to do paid work, particularly if there was sufficient support from the Federal Government and related agencies for training, child care and other associated costs. The reported willingness to engage in the paid workforce may have been a result

of a social desirability bias (SDB). Fisher and Katz (2000) state SDB is especially common in responses to self-reported value questions. Typically, research participants tend to provide acceptable or socially desirable responses rather than responses which may be controversial or less socially desirable (Fisher & Katz, 2000). As being part of the paid workforce is a positive value highly esteemed in Australian society, a degree of SDB is likely in responses to questions regarding paid work.

Training to develop or enhance skills and renew self-confidence was identified as an area of support required by some solo mothers in the current study who had been out of the paid workforce for some years. Training and self esteem courses have previously been acknowledged to support solo mothers in the paid work environment (Angleton, 2005; Lipman et al., 2010). However, funding for training is scarce and aimed only at moving people from welfare to paid work rather than to develop long term career options (Guenther et al., 2008). The Federal Budget for 2011-2012 stipulated there would be more places in training for solo parents, particularly teenage parents, thus mediating the previous scarcity of training (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Tertiary education is an option for some solo mothers for obtaining qualifications and better job offers with higher income. Unfortunately, only solo mothers on PPS or DSP, or who commenced tertiary education prior to receiving NSA, are eligible for assistance with PES (Centrelink, 2010).

Child care also factored heavily for the solo mothers in the current study in being able to work full time or at least receive a good wage. Concerns about child care were the costs and the quality as well as accessibility. Some mothers had calculated negligible financial gains from working, after child care costs had been accounted for. Regardless of child care rebates easing the financial burden, as suggested by McCartney and colleagues (2007), Baker (2008) as well as Cobb-Clark et al. (2000) suggested that child care costs could be prohibitive. Further, Rush (2008) stated finding quality child

care that was affordable and accessible was very difficult and this was also a concern for some of the mothers in the current study.

Flexible workplaces and hours were practices solo mothers have previously identified as supportive in returning to the paid workforce (Gray & Tudball, 2000; Millar & Ridge, 2008). Some of the solo mothers in the current study, who were working for pay, experienced a flexible workplace, however limited leave necessitated child care or vacation care facilities during school holidays. Some employers were described as inflexible by some mothers and could result in being forced to make a choice between paid work responsibilities and responsibilities as a parent. This forced choice was found to be detrimental to the solo mothers' career and at times income was foregone because of family responsibilities.

Paid part time work was considered to be the ideal type of work by many of the solo mothers. Although more amenable to work-family life balance, Saunders (2006) asserted part time wages were not sufficient to keep a family free from financial stress and also meant remaining on a part welfare payment. Changes to taper rates for NSA planned to commence in 2013 may mediate continued financial hardship to some extent by allowing solo parents to retain more of their payments along with income from work (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Paid casual work was also sought by some of the solo mothers in the current study, which was difficult to regulate because of variable work hours and also family responsibilities. Casual work though is fraught with drawbacks through unpredictable and often family unfriendly hours, lack of sick leave and annual leave as well as insecure tenure (Burgess & Connell, 2005; Pocock, 2005).

Income, in the current study, was defined as welfare payments, wages, child support payments and other benefits such as Family Tax Benefit and child care rebates. As a result of varying sources and amounts of income, it was difficult to differentiate how much each of the incomes influenced wellbeing. However, child support payments

were often stated as a source of contention among the solo mothers. Although child support was introduced in 1988 (Daniels, 2010) to ensure both parents took financial responsibility for the children, perceptions were that some fathers had rorted the system and were paying the minimum amount, thus affecting the total amount of income to the solo mothers' homes. This being said, the mothers in the current study did not dwell on lack of child support payments during the interviews and appeared to accept this phenomenon as outside their control. Indeed a sense of independence and resilience was displayed by the solo mothers.

The RGWR (2000) speculated that participating in the paid workforce would promote social inclusion and more cohesive communities. This was not noted as a feature in the quantitative data analysis although interviewees indicated the solo mothers who were engaged in the paid workforce enjoyed the social contact with work colleagues. Social support from workmates was also noted as a positive consequence of work. Even so, it was noted that some of the solo mothers in the current study were employed in jobs that did not promote contact with other colleagues. These jobs were often casual and part time jobs, such as cleaners, carers and some hospitality work where the individual worked autonomously.

Many of the solo mothers who participated in interviews did speak of the importance of friends and their support making life as a solo mother less isolated. The solo mothers who were not in the paid workforce were more likely to have good support networks of friends, whereas the mothers working for pay tended to have to rely on other sources of support to enable them to do paid work (e.g. child care centres, relatives). Interestingly though, similar to findings from Webber and Boromeo's (2005) study, support from friends and family was not always welcome due to perceived moral judgements.

Solo mothers who were not in paid employment indicated they were able to volunteer at the children's school and engage in activities as helper parents. Volunteering within the school was perceived as being worthy work and indeed Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005) stated schools were dependent upon parents as volunteers for smooth running and financial success. Hence, volunteer parents in schools can contribute to the overall culture of the school community as well as enhance their own wellbeing.

Working for pay appeared to result in less involvement with the local community, although if the children were involved in activities, there was more likelihood of having contact with others. Similar to Stewart et al. (2008) assertions, it may be that the solo mothers doing paid work, being time poor, found it difficult to engage within their local communities. As some of the solo mothers stated, after paid work, the work involved with keeping the family home in order – cooking, cleaning and other home duties – left very little time for anything else.

Clearly, there are benefits and disadvantages to both working in the paid workforce and relying on welfare. Further, the conflicts that arose for the solo mothers in the current study made the choice between paid work and welfare difficult. For instance, solo mothers who chose to stay home to care for the children were often left with inadequate income. Not being in the paid workforce enabled these solo mothers to be available to their children and be more involved in school activities. Solo mothers, who worked either part time or full time, were earning more money, so there was opportunity for more resources and luxuries. Nevertheless, many of the solo mothers doing paid work disclosed being unavailable emotionally and physically for their children as well as having no personal time. Choices such as these were frustrating and unsatisfying for many of the solo mothers, regardless of the decision made.

Markus and Schwartz (2010) referred to having choices as promoting autonomy. Welfare to Work reforms were perceived as taking those choices away and subsequently, many of the solo mothers in the current study alluded to a loss of control over how their children would be cared for and how the family would be managed. Markus and Schwartz asserted lack of choice may lead to lower wellbeing and also too much choice is likely to cause frustration and indecision, which may also influence wellbeing. Some of the solo mothers spoke about having the role of solo parenting devalued by the Federal Government.

The way in which the reforms affected solo mothers varied. There was greater relevance for solo mothers who were not already in the paid workforce as they were the most likely to be affected by being coerced to look for paid part time work. The perceived lack of consultation regarding the reforms was considered to be paternalistic and a sense of helplessness and powerlessness were observed with some of the mothers interviewed. Lack of knowledge and empathy regarding circumstances and needs of solo mothers appeared to lead to loss of trust in decision makers, thus perceived procedural fairness was lacking for the solo mothers in the current study. The perceptions of the solo mothers were indicative of a belief in an unjust world and certainly an external locus of control as described by Ahrens and Ryff (2006) and Lipkus et al. (1996) and as such may explain the lower levels of subjective wellbeing evident among solo mothers in the current study.

Avery and Quiñones (2002) suggested the opportunity to contribute to decision making processes, along with a following positive outcome, would increase the level of trust in decision makers and procedural fairness. However, Tyler (1994) and Lind and Tyler (1988) maintained having a voice upheld the perception of fairness and was more important than the outcomes. De Cremer and Tyler (2007) stated compliance with decisions made was more likely if the decision making process was perceived as fair.

Many of the solo mothers in the current study agreed the perceived lack of consultation regarding welfare reforms engendered a sense of marginalisation and being devalued as parents and members of society. Feelings of mistrust in the Federal Government were also voiced, with comments made about being at the mercy of decisions made by men in power, thus negating any evidence of procedural fairness. It appears then, that similar to Avery and Quiñones (2002) assertions, perceptions of being excluded from decision making processes led to mistrust in the Federal Government because suitable opportunity to contribute to decisions about welfare reforms was not provided.

Although procedural fairness was not acknowledged by the solo mothers in the current study, a degree of distributive fairness was acknowledged. The amount of welfare assistance provided was appreciated by those who received welfare. However, the amount was not considered to be adequate to raise a family and for the solo mothers who were unable to do paid work because of disability, this caused great hardship to the extent where their health was compromised further. Even so, despite the considerable variation in income for the solo mothers, either because of child support amounts or income from paid work, none stated it was unfair that some solo mothers received more income than others, and none begrudged the use of taxes for welfare payments.

It appears welfare payments such as DSP and PPS are allocated according to a combination of needs and equality rules such as explained by Hamilton (2006). While seemingly fair, the needs of individuals or groups can be subjectively determined and so some welfare distributions may not be suitable for all (Hamilton, 2006). Indeed, this is illustrated by the rationale for transferring solo parents to NSA once the youngest child reaches eight years of age. This change does not seem to adhere to any distributive fairness rules. Although the Federal Government purported solo parents needed incentives to move from welfare to paid employment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010), the reduced financial assistance appears to be discriminatory and marginalising

rather than providing incentive. Many of the solo mothers, both in the paid workforce and not, were angry regarding the change from PPS to NSA for new recipients if the youngest child was eight years or older. Adherence to equity, equality and needs rules (Brotheridge, 2003; Hamilton, 2006; Huseman et al., 1987; Leventhal, 1977) appeared to be lacking in this reform. Major criticisms of the reform concerned the lesser amount of payment for solo mothers receiving NSA despite increased costs as the children got older. The transition from being considered and potentially valued as a mother to being labelled unemployed was perceived as an injustice and a negative value judgement of solo mothers.

Although NSA payments for solo parents with children older than eight years of age appear to be remaining, the changes to the taper rates for NSA in relation to income earned will be a welcome variation. The changes will bring the taper rates for NSA in line with those for PPS recipients. Further, the gradual phasing out of grandfathered PPS from 2013 will mean all solo parents will transfer to NSA once their youngest child reaches the age of eight years (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) thus making the welfare system more equitable for solo parents.

Overall, the low levels of subjective wellbeing appeared to be aligned with powerlessness through being dependent on the current legislation regarding welfare, the level of income, particularly disposable income, and perceptions of being devalued as parents. The levels of support from family, friends, work colleagues and organisations also contributed to wellbeing. Locus of control and belief in a just world also appeared to influence wellbeing as did resilience and independence.

Limitations and Strengths

There are several limitations and strengths in the current study. The participants were self selecting, and the majority of solo mothers who participated were from Western Australia. There were also larger numbers of solo mothers who lived in urban

areas. Western Australia is a large state and is sparsely populated in comparison to other Australian states. As such, the solo mothers in the current study may not be representative of solo mothers across Australia. Providing a voice for solo mothers however, is a strength in the current study as solo mothers can be marginalised and socially excluded.

Some of the solo mothers in the current study were from rural areas, however, the challenges particular to rural solo mothers were not explored in depth. The issues for solo mothers who live in the rural areas are likely to be different compared to solo mothers living in urban areas. For example, issues such as lack of resources, child care, transport and employment opportunities with associated inflated costs may have even greater relevance for solo mothers in rural areas.

Although the sample size was adequate and allowed for appropriate analyses, the relatively small self selecting sample may have influenced the lack of statistically significant effects of paid work and education. Further, a larger sample size may have lent itself to further comparisons between groups, thus providing deeper and more intricate examination of factors influencing subjective wellbeing. For example, a more even distribution among the metropolitan and rural areas may have provided better information of particular challenges or strengths for solo mothers who live in either area.

Researcher bias may have been influential in the gathering and analysis of qualitative data. The researcher had a personal history of solo parenting and thus, may have implied meanings to data not readily detected by researchers with a different history. However, all aspects of maintaining rigour were undertaken to ensure that these effects were minimised (see page 94-95). Nevertheless, knowledge of some challenges faced by solo mothers also provided insight and was useful in building rapport and to convey empathy in some circumstances.

Also of some concern was the inclusion of solo mothers who are currently receiving DSP. These solo mothers may have skewed the results due to poor health and other challenges associated with an inability to do paid work without significant support and/or intervention. A balanced sample of solo mothers would have been more appropriate to ensure generalisation of the quantitative results.

The theoretical framework of social constructionism and feminist theory/inquiry for the current study was considered appropriate by the researcher. However, other frameworks may have also been suitable and perhaps provided data with alternative foci with which to work. For example, an interpretivist framework using a phenomenological form of enquiry would have delved more into the lived experiences of each of the solo mothers. Further, ethnographical study may also have provided firsthand experience of living as a solo mother in Australian society.

Implications

Implications of the current study are that solo mothers construct their wellbeing within social context. Factors such as income, being valued as a parent, taking part in decision making processes, availability of support services and being able to make choices regarding the future contribute to the construction of wellbeing in solo mothers. It should be noted that many of the aforementioned factors, in isolation, do not necessarily affect wellbeing, but rather, interact in complex and dynamic ways. A holistic approach is necessary to promote higher levels of subjective wellbeing among solo mothers through involvement in decision making, and more thorough and transparent consultation.

As income was shown to be a major influence in constructing wellbeing for the solo mothers in the current study, more attention paid to issues such as education and training to ensure solo mothers are better equipped for higher paid work is warranted. Provision of tertiary education support and other training opportunities with a long term

career focus are likely to lead to more satisfying career and work options for solo mothers with higher incomes to reflect ability. Greater satisfaction with work attracting a higher income is likely to prevent return to reliance upon welfare payments and lessen the burden on the welfare system.

Higher self esteem as a mother can be achieved through recognition of the important role of mothering regardless of being a solo parent or partnered parent. The implied lack of importance of the parenting role for solo mothers on welfare payments, once the youngest child reaches the age of eight years, may be insulting to solo mothers who manage to parent without the assistance of a partner. NSA is an allowance that was allocated for jobseekers and PPS was a payment for parents without partners. While the parenting responsibilities do not effectively change when a child reaches eight years of age, for welfare payment purposes, the solo mother is first and foremost a jobseeker rather than a parent, although the rationale is couched in terms of incentive to do paid work. Further, the lower welfare payment of NSA ignores the fact that the costs of raising children increases along with age, thus placing more strain on financial resources. Denigrating a solo mother's role as a parent by labelling her as a jobseeker rather than as a mother is more likely to lead to lower levels of subjective wellbeing, more incidences of poor mental health and protracted financial stress. Return to the more equitable eligibility for all solo mothers to receive PPS is recommended to acknowledge the solo mother's ongoing responsibility to her children. Further consideration to change some of the language surrounding welfare support may also lessen negative connotations and stereotyping.

Engaging solo mothers and other people from disadvantaged backgrounds in decision making processes initiated by the government that will potentially affect the wellbeing of solo mothers is essential to promote inclusion. Decisions that impact the socioeconomic status of solo mothers, ability to care effectively for children and

participation within the wider community need to be made in consultation with solo mothers, agencies and organisations that support them, as well as businesses and the wider community. Thorough understanding amongst all parties is recommended. This conveys a sense of empathy to the concerns of solo mothers. Further, such consultations should be transparent and accountable within the decision making process. Improved communication and involvement by solo mothers in decision making potentially affecting financial and social wellbeing will be vital in ensuring perceived fairness during change processes.

Solo mothers require numerous support services to assist them in negotiating everyday life as well as engaging in work related activities. Support services may be in the form of welfare agencies that can assist with household costs, food or clothing. Emergency child care arrangements or support in times of extreme hardship related to health issues is also an important consideration especially for solo mothers who have limited family support. Child care facilities for mothers doing paid work, that cater for weekend work as well as weekday work, and encouragement for employers to provide family friendly work hours and conditions are likely to provide accessible support for solo mothers to do paid work. Incentives for employers provided by the government to promote family friendly workplaces may lead to greater employment chances for solo mothers, improved financial status and increased wellbeing.

Future Research Opportunities

There are ample opportunities for future research to further elicit the many nuances within the construction of wellbeing for solo mothers. For example, further research into the resilience of many solo mothers would provide insight into the types of programs or assistance which could raise the subjective wellbeing of other solo mothers with fewer protective factors. Research directly comparing the wellbeing of solo mothers living in rural areas with those who live in metropolitan areas may further

highlight services and support systems most beneficial for solo mothers. Solo mothers' identities could be explored more thoroughly in light of participation requirements for welfare payments and the resulting effect on wellbeing. Further examination of perceptions of stereotypes and stigma in relation to solo parenting may also elicit more in-depth information regarding the influence on wellbeing.

Further research into other contributing factors to subjective wellbeing such as the effects on wellbeing of the amount of time children spend with the other parent, the amounts of income received from the other parent may provide more information regarding the importance of the other parent's contribution. Further investigation regarding the hours of paid work undertaken by solo mothers, and the length of time a solo mother has been solo will also serve to add to the body of knowledge.

Utilising different research methods may also be appropriate. For example, longitudinal studies would be able to track the solo mothers' level of wellbeing over time and would be a valuable tool for establishing long term programs to assist solo mothers become empowered and participate more fully in community life. Similarly, participatory action research to work in partnership with solo mothers, providing feedback to initiate action, may be a useful strategy to continually develop and enhance the wellbeing of solo mothers.

Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to explore the construction of wellbeing of solo mothers and the relationship that may exist between work, welfare, social justice and wellbeing for this particular group. The research was conducted in the climate following the announcement by the Federal Government in 2005 that major welfare reform would occur from July 1, 2006. Quantitative data and subsequent analysis indicated solo mothers have significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing compared to the general population of Australia. Interestingly, although previous research had indicated paid

work enhances wellbeing, this was not evident in analysis of the quantitative data in the current study. Qualitative data from interviews with 15 solo mothers indicated a complex array of factors that influenced subjective wellbeing. Many of the solo mothers interviewed stated they enjoyed the social interaction and opportunity to be a positive role model when doing paid work. However, the positive effects of paid work were somewhat diminished by the role conflict often caused by putting work ahead of family. Financial hardship was also a salient factor in terms of experiencing wellbeing regardless of work status. Lack of supportive relationships was noted as an important factor with many solo mothers perceiving their social situation as being negatively stereotyped. In terms of social justice, the solo mothers in the current study perceived a sense of powerlessness due to lack of open consultation from the Federal Government. There was a distinct lack of trust of politicians in general and belief that politicians had little empathy for solo mothers. Particularly revealing was the wish by some of the solo mothers that politicians could “walk in their shoes” for a week to experience the challenges of daily life as a solo mother.

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Appendix A**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-29	9	12.3
30-39	26	35.6
40-49	36	49.2
50+	2	2.8
Totals	73	100

Years as solo parent	Frequency	Percentage
5 years or less	25	34.2
> 5, < 10 years	38	53.1
10 years +	10	12.7
Totals	73	100

Weekly Income	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 350	3	4.1
350-499	18	24.7
Less than 650	20	27.4
650-799	14	19.2
800-999	8	11
1000+	7	9.6
Missing data	3	4.1
Totals	73	100

Financial sources	Frequency	Percentage
Welfare payments	56	76.7
Child support	53	72.6
Work	50	68.5

Residential status	Frequency	Percentage
Rent/board	37	50.7
Own/mortgage	36	49.3
Totals	73	100

Education Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
Year 10	14	19.2
Year 12	13	17.8
TAFE	18	24.7
University	28	38.4
Totals	73	100

Work History	Frequency	Percentage of sample
Prior work	70	95.9
Skilled work	42	57.5
Currently working	50	68.5

State	WA	QLD	NSW	VIC	SA	TAS	ACT	NT
Participants	40	21	3	1	2	4	2	0

Appendix B

Newspaper notice – Solo Mothers Project

Kathryn Russell, a doctoral student from Edith Cowan University, is conducting research on the wellbeing of solo mothers. The research involves filling in a short survey that will take approximately 10 minutes with a further opportunity for participation in a confidential interview. If you can help, please call Kathryn on 0419 807 142 or email k.russell@ecu.edu.au to receive the survey form. Please note that this research has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

Are you a solo mother with your youngest child aged between 6 and 10?

My name is Kathryn Russell and I'm a doctoral student in Community Psychology at Edith Cowan University. For my research I am seeking solo mothers to take part in a confidential survey about their wellbeing. The survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. There is also an opportunity to participate further through a confidential interview.

All information gathered is treated in the strictest confidence and participation can be withdrawn at any time.

If you are interested in taking part in the survey, please call Kathryn on 0419 807 142 or email at k.russell@ecu.edu.au

This research has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. For further information about this research please call Associate Professor Lisbeth Pike (supervisor) on 6304 5535 or Kim Gifkins (research ethics officer) on 6304 2170.

Appendix C

Solo Mothers Project

Information Sheet For Potential Participant (Questionnaire)

Dear Potential Participant

Thank you for offering to participate in my research study. My name is Kathryn Russell and I am currently studying at Edith Cowan University. As part of the Doctor of Psychology course, I am required to complete a research project. Formal approval has been received for this project from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

In my study I will be looking at wellbeing of solo mothers and the relationship with work, welfare, and social justice. I anticipate that it will be beneficial to gain some insight into the relationships between these concepts for solo mothers and those who may influence work and welfare options for solo mothers.

There are four separate research items within the package. There is a demographics sheet, the wellbeing questionnaire, a sheet with three questions specific to the changes in Parenting Payment and how they will affect you, and a sheet for contact details should you wish to participate in an interview.

The demographics sheet will take approximately five minutes to complete. This will enable me to collect data that will aid in my analysis of the questionnaire. Please be assured that any of the information will remain confidential.

The questionnaire itself will take approximately five minutes to complete. All information that you provide in the questionnaire will remain confidential.

The sheet with specific questions regarding the parenting payment will help guide the interviewing phase of the research. The answers to these questions will also be treated as confidential.

The sheet for contact details will enable me to contact you should you wish to participate further in an interview. If you wish to take part in an interview about your experiences as a sole mother, please fill in your contact information attached to the questionnaire.

- 2 -

Please return your completed questionnaire sheets in the enclosed reply paid envelope or via email to k.russell@ecu.edu.au as soon as possible. If you have indicated your willingness to participate in a further interview, I will contact you to arrange an appropriate time.

If you would like a summary of the results sent to you please ensure you supply contact information on the enclosed contact information sheet. A full copy of the completed study will be available within the ECU library. Results may also be made available to interested persons such as the Minister for Families and organisations such as the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children.

Sometimes issues raised by material in questionnaires may result in discomfort. Hopefully this will not occur, but if you feel that you need to talk to someone, telephone contacts are added at the end of this information sheet that you will be able to call for support.

Receipt of the completed questionnaire will be taken as consent for the information supplied to be used in the study. Please note you are under no obligation at any time to complete the questionnaire.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please call me on 0419 807 142 or alternatively, you may like to call my supervisor, A/Professor Lisbeth Pike on 6304 5593. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Your assistance with this project is greatly appreciated.

Thank you

Kathryn Russell
Phone: 0419 807 142
Email: k.russell@ecu.edu.au

Please keep this sheet for your own reference.

Life Line: 13 1114
Salvo Care Line: 9227 8655

Appendix D**Solo Mothers Project****Demographics Sheet**

Please provide answers to the following demographic questions. The information provided will assist in analysis of information gained from the questionnaire. Some of the information may be personal and private. Please be assured that I will treat the information you provide in the strictest of confidence.

What is your age?.....

For how long have you been a sole mother?.....

How many children currently live with you?

What are the ages of your children who live with you?

Do you own your own home, rent, or board?

How much do you pay each week for mortgage, rent or board?

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?.....

Did you work in the paid workforce prior to having your child/ren?

If yes, what sort of work did you engage in?

Do you currently work in the paid workforce?

If yes, how many hours do you work per week?

Do you receive Parenting Payment?

Do you receive Family tax benefit A?.....B?

Do you receive child support payments?

How much child support payments do you receive per month?

Do you receive any other income?.....

How much income do you currently receive per week?.....
(Please include all sources of income, e.g. child support, FTB etc).

In which Australian state or territory do you live?

Satisfaction with Life as a Whole and The PWI Scale (Written Format)

The following questions ask how satisfied you feel, on a scale from zero to 10. **Zero** means you feel completely dissatisfied. **10** means you feel completely satisfied. And the **middle of the scale is 5**, which means you feel neutral, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.”

Test Items

Completely Dissatisfied Neutral Completely Satisfied

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

[] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — []

Completely Dissatisfied Neutral Completely Satisfied

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

[] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — [] — []

Completely Dissatisfied Neutral Completely Satisfied

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Completely Dissatisfied Neutral Completely Satisfied

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

Completely Dissatisfied Neutral Completely Satisfied

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

Completely Dissatisfied Neutral Completely Satisfied

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

Completely Dissatisfied Neutral Completely Satisfied

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

Appendix F**Solo Mothers Project****Experiences of the Solo Mother**

From July 1, 2006 new Parenting Payment (single) recipients will have to seek part time work of 15hours per week once their youngest child reaches the age of 6. When their youngest child turns 8, they will transfer to the lower paying Newstart allowance. For existing Parenting Payment (single) recipients, there will be no change to the payment received, however they will be expected to seek part time work from July 1, 2007 or once their youngest child turns 7 after July 1, 2007.

Please answer the following questions in light of the information given, regarding the reforms that will affect Parenting Payment:

How will these changes affect you?

a. Financially?

.....

.....

b. Personally?

.....

.....

c. In your parenting role?

.....

.....

Appendix G**Addendum (potential interviewees)**

If you wish to participate further by taking part in an interview regarding your experiences as a solo mother, please fill in the form below.

Your first name

Your contact telephone number

The best time to contact you to arrange an interview is.....

Addendum (forwarding of summarised results of study)

If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the research, please fill in the form below. Please be assured your details will remain confidential.

Email address:

Or

Your first name:

Postal address:

Appendix H

Interview schedule – Solo Mothers Project

Parental Role

1. What do you think is your role as a parent?
2. What are the most important things that enable you to fulfil your role as a parent?

Prompts such as:

- a. How do you ensure this is done?
- b. What are some of the things that may hinder you?
3. Tell me what it's like being a sole parent.

Prompts such as:

- a. What sort of things do you like most about being a solo parent?
- b. What sort of things do you like least about being a solo parent?
4. What does it mean to have the opportunity or the choice to stay home while your children are growing up?

Solo Parenting and Work

5. What are your thoughts on being a solo parent and working in the paid workforce?

Prompts such as:

- a. What are the benefits about being a sole parent in the paid workforce?
- b. What is the downside to being a solo parent in the paid workforce?
- c. What would be your ideal situation in terms of parenting and paid work?

Welfare to Work Reform for Solo Parents

Explain the changes that are to take effect from July 1, 2006.

From July 1, 2006 new Parenting Payment (single) recipients will have to seek part time work of 15 hours per week once their youngest child reaches the age of 6. When their youngest child turns 8, they will transfer to the lower paying Newstart allowance. For existing Parenting Payment (single) recipients, there will be no change to the payment received, however they will be expected to seek part time work from July 1, 2007 or once their youngest child turns 7 after July 1, 2007.

6. What does it mean to you to be obliged to seek part time work to receive income support from Centrelink?
7. Would you seek work if you were not obliged to in order to receive income support from Centrelink? Tell me more....

Welfare to Work Reform and Social Justice

8. How fair do you think the Federal Government is being in bringing the Welfare to Work reforms as they relate to solo parents?
More specifically:

- a. How fair is the obligation to work 15hr pw once the youngest child is 6?
- b. How fair is the compliance measure of suspension of payments for up to 8 weeks if there is a serious non-compliance with conditions? (explain what constitutes serious non-compliance if necessary).
- c. How fair is the enhanced Newstart for new solo parents rather than Parenting Payment once the youngest child is 8?

Welfare to Work Reform and Procedural Fairness

9. What do you think would have been the fairest way for the government to change the welfare system for yourself as a solo parent?
 - a. For other solo parents?
10. How do you feel knowing that decisions have been made about income supports that may affect you, without being able to have direct input into that decision making?

Prompts such as:

- a. Do you believe that the degree of input into the decision making process may impact on the distribution (how much and how often) of income support for solo mothers?

Welfare to Work Reform and Distributive Fairness

11. What do you think would be the fairest outcome of changes to welfare for you personally as a solo parent?
 - a. For other solo parents?
12. Do you believe that the income support you receive is fair?

Prompts such as:

- a. Is it fair and just that the taxes of other Australian citizens are put to use in some part for social security payments for solo parents?
- b. Do the payments from social security provide enough income support for your immediate needs?
- c. Do the payments from social security provide a fair amount for solo mothers?
13. Solo parents receive differing amounts of child support and Family Assistance but are entitled to the same rate of Parenting Payment. Additionally, some solo parents may receive income from paid employment. What are your views on the fairness of solo parents receiving income support through child support, the Family Assistance Office, Parenting Payment as well as the possibility of receiving payment from employment?
 - a. How do you think Parenting Payment could be made fairer or more equitable for all solo parents?

Appendix I

Solo Mothers Project

Information Sheet For Potential Participant (Interview)

Dear Potential Participant

Thank you for offering to participate in my research study. My name is Kathryn Russell and I am currently studying at Edith Cowan University. As part of the Doctor of Psychology course, I am required to complete a research project. Formal approval has been received for this project from the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

In my study I will be looking at wellbeing of solo mothers and the relationship with work, welfare, and social justice. I anticipate that it will be beneficial to gain some insight into the relationships between these concepts for solo mothers and those who may influence work and welfare options for solo mothers.

All information that you provide during the interview will remain confidential.

The proposed study will comprise a taped interview of approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The tape will be transcribed verbatim, but any identifying information will be removed. After transcription, a copy of the interview will be forwarded to you to ensure that the information is correct. The tape will be erased following transcription to ensure confidentiality.

A summary of the results of the study will be forwarded to you on completion of the study and a full copy of the completed study will be available within the ECU library. Results may also be made available to interested persons such as the Minister for Families and organisations such as the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children.

- 2 -

Sometimes issues raised in interviews may result in discomfort. Hopefully this will not occur, but if you feel that you need to talk to someone, telephone contacts are added at the end of this information sheet that you will be able to call for support.

You are under no obligation to complete the study. If you wish to withdraw at any time for any reason, please let me know and the interview will stop immediately without any consequences.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please call me on 0419 807 142 or alternatively, you may like to call my supervisor, A/Professor Lisbeth Pike on 6304 5593. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Your assistance with this project is greatly appreciated.

Thank you

Kathryn Russell
Phone: 0419 807 142
Email: k.russell@ecu.edu.au

Please keep this sheet for your own reference.

Life Line:	13 1114
Salvo Care Line:	9227 8655

Appendix J**Consent Form - Solo Mothers Project**

I.....have read the information and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this project, realising that I may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

I agree that the research data obtained for this study may be published provided that I am not identifiable.

I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be audio recorded. I also understand that the recording will be erased once the interview is transcribed. I understand that all information is confidential.

Participant:

Date:

Researcher:

Date:

Appendix K

Q3 What it's like being a solo parent

53 K. Ok Um, so tell me what it's like for you being a sole parent.

54

55 D. What's it like? I think I've gotten used to it over the years. You do get
56 used to it. You know you have to learn to survive. Um, It's not, of course it's
57 not the ideal situation because there's never anybody to help you with the
58 kid's behaviour. And especially having boys. I have all boys so you know it's
59 hard to be, well you can't be a father but you've still got to discipline them
60 but you find when they get to their teenage years you're just a woman and
61 they get stronger than you and that becomes very, very difficult. And yeah,
62 I've had my share of not so nice [spats???inaudible].

resilience

No support

*Father
role*

63
64 K. ok so tell me what are some of the benefits of being a sole parent?

65

66 D. well, you don't have to answer to anybody about how you spend money.
67 Which is probably a good thing [laughs]
68

Less conflict

Px	Line	VALUES & MIXED MESSAGES – FAMILY STRUCTURES & STEREOTYPES
64	473-479	<i>Why do they [parents new to welfare system] have to go onto Newstart for? Why is it that they are suddenly not a parent? That they're not entitled to parenting allowance? Are they no longer a parent? Aren't they in the same regulations? Why do they have to change it that way? That's my point. People who have the same criteria but they're not being treated the same....they've got to look at - everybody needs to be treated the same</i>
17	596-597	<i>We [solo parents] actually are assets because we're trying to bring up the next generation. I'm sick of feeling like a liability</i>
9	408-415	<i>Society still thinks that people should be in couples and you know I don't think that is the issue in parenting...the family structure doesn't have to be nuclear family and we shouldn't be excommunicated because we don't fit into the traditional structure...there are lots of different structures which are equally as good in terms of parenting and developing the child</i>
9	428-431	<i>I guess my concern is that there's a lot of negativity associated with single parents and considered as being a bad person and failed in society. And I guess the worst part is that every time I go to a barbecue the first thing is 'oh, you don't have a partner, she doesn't have a father, isn't that bad for her?'</i>
6	30-34	<i>We tend to be looked down upon, as lesser beings, we're not their social equals, we're a threat to their married status, in that they're quite ready to view us as ready to target their husbands...it's just a judgement that's based on a lot of media and government stereotypes I think</i>
6	97-101	<i>You only matter to the government if you are part of a married couple family. If you're a single mother, neither you nor your children are as valuable. You don't contribute to society if you are a stay at home mother...being a mother in itself is not valued at all. It's not placed in perspective as a job. It's just written off as a liability and not the enormous asset it is</i>
5	572-576	<i>Both my kids go to scouts and a few weeks ago we were all sitting around and chatting and somebody said something derogatory about single mothers and I just had to go 'stop right there, I'm a single mother' and you know, they were like, 'oh yeah, we forgot'. And you know that was in my own kind of group...people I mix with</i>

Appendix L

Biographies

Grace

Grace is a 40 year old solo mother who has been separated for nine years. Grace has two sons aged 10 and 14 years. Apart from working as a hairdresser prior to having children, she has only worked on a casual basis. Even though Grace has been diagnosed with a potentially degenerative condition, she is not eligible for a disability pension. She is unable to return to her former work as a hairdresser due to the condition. Grace rented her accommodation, however would have liked to have been able to buy her own home to have some stability. She received regular child support from the children's father and they had regular contact with the father. Grace was willing to work even though this had not been a goal when married; however she wanted to be retrained for a more suitable job and she preferred school hours.

Maria

Maria is 39 years old and is a survivor of domestic violence. She has been separated for three and a half years and cares for her four children aged between six and 14 years.

Maria is completing a Masters degree at university and was hoping to obtain work within the public service on graduation. She had previously worked in the public service and Maria thought working in a professional capacity would be good modelling for her children. Maria has few supports in her area, however the children's father makes regular child support payments and has regular contact with the children. Maria perceives solo mothers are stigmatised and the Federal Government does not value solo parent families as valuable as couple parent families.

Lucy

Lucy is 39 years old has one child aged eight years. She has been a solo mother for 4 years. Lucy is currently renting and also has a mortgaged home which she has as an investment property. Lucy does not have many supports where she lives as she is new to the area and there is no family near her. Her daughter's father does not have any contact with her and pays the absolute minimum child support. Lucy works full time as a teacher and enjoys her work, however feels she is disadvantaged sometimes to take part in work events outside of normal hours due to her caring responsibilities. Lucy was unhappy with the quality of affordable child care in her area, however perceived she did not have a choice in quality.

Joy

Joy is a 28 year old solo mother. She had chosen to be a solo mother and her son was seven and a half years old. Although Joy sometimes struggles financially and socially, she has some good support from her family and some from her son's father. Her son has regular contact with his father and child support is paid regularly. Joy works part time and has a tertiary qualification in administration. Joy is paying off her home and she feels this is an advantage, although she considers it inequitable that she does not receive any assistance from the government for mortgage payments. Joy perceives her circumstances as being fortunate as she has kept her work skills up to date and is able to work on a part time basis.

Anna

Anna is a 45 year old solo mother with two children aged seven and 16 years. She has been a solo mother for 13 years and is paying a mortgage on her home. She currently works full time and has a tertiary qualification. She receives the minimum child support for her children and only one of her children has contact with her father. Anna has few supports as she has no family and only a few friends. She relies on child care for her younger child. Anna feels she is marginalised for being a solo mother with caring responsibilities as she is unable to attend meetings if they are scheduled late or interfere with picking up her child from child care. She feels she is being held back from career advancement because there is no flexibility to recognise her caring responsibilities. Anna also feels there is stigma surrounding being a solo parent and has been questioned in the past about the negative influence this will have on her children.

Rita

Rita is a 44 year old widow who has three children living with her aged between 9 and 13 years. She currently works full time in school administration and has a tertiary qualification. Rita receives child support for one of her children; however it is the minimum amount. She is paying a mortgage on her own home. Rita found having all boys was difficult as she considered boys need a father. Rita enjoys working as it gives her a chance to interact with other adults, but she finds it difficult to have personal time due to time press. She feels she is unable to spend much quality time with her children because of her other duties.

Chris

Chris is 32 years old and chose to be a solo parent. She has two children aged six and nine years who have different fathers. She is paying a mortgage on her own home and has a tertiary education. She has been having treatment for cancer and is currently not working. However she has worked part time prior to the treatment for cancer. She currently receives child support from one father. Chris does not have any family in Australia and her children do not have any contact with their fathers. She feels isolated due to the lack of support. She is concerned about the lack of child care in her area and thinks this is a barrier for solo mothers finding work.

Ellen

Ellen is a 34 year old solo mother on Disability Pension. She has two children living with her aged six and eight years. She has been a solo mother for nine years. Ellen has a tertiary qualification and has worked in skilled work prior to having children. She does not receive any child support and is living in public housing accommodation. Ellen's children also have significant health problems. As a result Ellen sometimes goes without her own medication or food so she can provide enough for her own children. Ellen has some good supports in place with friends and neighbours.

Mary

Mary is a 37 year old solo mother of two children aged seven and eight years. She has been a solo mother for 6 years. Mary pays a mortgage on her own home and currently works part time in the public service. She has qualifications to teach hairdressing and used to manage hair salons and wig salons as well as teach hairdressing. Mary was unable to continue in her hairdressing work when she separated due to child care issues and having to work on Saturdays. Mary does not have any family in Australia. Mary receives child support from the children's father and he also has regular contact with the children. Mary considers herself to be fortunate because she has a job during school hours, however she has to work during school holidays and she has to place the children in vacation care.

Fran

Fran is a 47 year old solo mother of an eight year old son. She has been solo for most of the eight years and is a survivor of domestic violence. She lives in public housing and is on Disability Pension. Prior to having her child she had achieved a tertiary degree and had been a senior journalist. Fran perceives solo mothers as being marginalised and this is perpetuated through the media. She also alluded to solo mother headed families being perceived as less valuable than couple parent families. Fran's ex husband previously had shared care 50-50, however now it is 25-75 and the majority of that care is during the AFL season so he can take their son to his football games and training. Fran has no family that she is aware of; she was adopted and her adoptive parents are supportive, but not readily accessible.

Jenny

Jenny is a solo mother of two girls aged six and eight years. She has been a solo mother for over six years. Jenny's ex husband has contact with the children once a month and she receives some child support that goes toward the mortgage. Jenny is currently on sick leave without pay and is being assisted by Centrelink until she is well enough to return to work. Jenny works part time as a public servant. She works from choice and enjoys the adult company. Jenny does not have parents who are able to support her and her sisters and she do not have a good relationship. Jenny relies on child care but also has a very good network of friends. Jenny is paying a small mortgage on her home and considers herself fortunate to have good budgeting skills and time management skills.

Liz

Liz is a 49 year old solo mother with two children aged nine and 16 years. She has been a solo mother for five years. Liz is currently paying off her home. She works full time as a research officer and has a Masters degree, however most of her work is on contract basis. She has recently had her mortgage payments put on hold while she was in between contracts. Liz receives less than the minimum amount of child support. Liz has no family support but has a good friendship network on which she relies. Although Liz has been suffering from depression for some time, she is proud of her achievements as a solo mother and being able to keep a full time job as well as keep the family intact. Liz's family are not supportive and do not understand her role as a solo parent. Liz believes working in paid employment should be a choice.

Lyn

Lyn is a 39 year old solo mother who has two children aged seven and eight years. Lyn has been a solo mother for four years and is living in rented accommodation. She moved with her children to a rural town, but has found it difficult to settle into the community. Lyn also has a medical condition that requires regular attention; however she has put this off because she is unable to have care for the children in their own home. Lyn is concerned about having to work part time as she has not worked for some time and lacks confidence and has low self esteem. Lyn has been studying part time and is hoping to continue her studies. She is moving to another state and will be staying with her brother. The children's father does not have much contact with the children and does not pay any child support. Lyn feels like she is in a minority and is at the mercy of the government.

Wendy

Wendy is 30 years old. She has been the solo mother of a nine year old son for six years. Wendy is renting her home and currently studying for a Bachelor degree. She does approximately 3 hours of casual work per week that is not constant. She has a history of unskilled work prior to having her son. Wendy is concerned regarding the likelihood of solo parents only being able to obtain unskilled menial work that will not enhance their quality of life. Wendy receives child support from her son's father. Her parents provide limited support as they work full time. Otherwise Wendy has variable supports in place. She lost some of her friends with the breakup and feels alienated with couple friends. Wendy feels she is judged harshly because she is a solo mother and this is supported by the media who portray solo mothers as decadent people. Wendy has previously suffered from depression which she found time consuming and also made it difficult for her to work every day.

Alice

Alice is 46 years old. She has been a solo mother for almost eight years and has two children aged nine and 16 years. She lives in a rural area in subsidised housing and works full time as a teacher in Education. Alice has always worked full time and was often the only income earner. She does not receive any child support from the children's father. Alice is a survivor of domestic violence and she moved to a rural area to avoid the constant abuse from her ex husband. Alice has very limited support from her family and very few friendships and she acknowledges she is isolated. Alice relies more on her colleagues for support when required.

Appendix M

Emerging Welfare Changes Federal Budget May 2011

Part of the package announced in the Federal Budget in May 2011 included increased training places for solo and teenage parents as well as new participation plans and supports for teenage parents (ACOSS 2011). For example, teenage parents will be required to complete Year 12 education as well as encouraging teenage parents to participate in programs that will improve parenting skills and child development (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

In order to assist all parents financially, an increase in the child care rebate will be made with up to 50 percent of out-of-pocket expenses per child paid to parents, with this rebate being made available fortnightly. A maximum of \$7,500 child care rebate will be available for each child. Further financial assistance for all parents includes the education tax refund of up to \$794 which can assist in meeting the costs of children's education. The low income tax offset will also be increased with individuals who earn below \$30,000 per annum receiving an increase of \$300 to have a low income tax offset of \$1,050. Middle income earners will also receive increases to the low income tax offset of between \$60 and \$220 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

More opportunities for training will be made available specifically for solo parents through partnership agreements with the states and territories (ACOSS, 2011; Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Further, career counselling and parenting support will be offered so that solo parents are able to enhance their employment options and foster better outcomes for children (Commonwealth of Australia). Community based support through the Communities for Children program will feature prominently for solo parents, particularly teenage parents (ACOSS).

Other incentives announced for solo parents include reforms of the income test for solo parents on NSA to commence in 2013. This reform will include a change to the

taper rate for NSA from 50 or 60 cents for each dollar earned over the threshold of \$62 to 40 cents in the dollar, thus potentially allowing solo parents to retain more of their income and encourage participation in work (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

Grandfathered PPS (PPS granted pre 2006) will gradually be phased out from 2013 for solo parents with youngest children aged between 12 and 15 years (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). These solo parents will then transfer to NSA payments (ACOSS, 2011). While the rationale for this change is to provide consistency with the requirements for other solo parents who are receiving PPS or NSA (Commonwealth of Australia), there will be a loss of welfare payment as is currently in place for NSA recipients.

In summary, the changes to welfare proposed in the 2011 budget recognise some of the concerns expressed by the solo mothers in the current study. While the changes do not address all issues surrounding welfare reform the apparent recognition of barriers faced by some mothers does indicate consideration of equality as well as needs. Further, the extra training places and community support measures are likely to enhance inclusion and engagement within the wider community.