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Urban Poverty, Structural Violence and Welfare Provision for 100 Families in Auckland

Darrin Hodgetts, Kerry Chamberlain, Shiloh Groot and Yardena Tankel

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Abstract

Socioeconomic inequalities are increasing in many OECD countries, as are punitive welfare reforms that pathologise ‘the poor’. This article draws on the accounts of 100 families in Auckland to consider the impacts of increased social stratification and structural violence on their interactions with a government welfare agency. Each family was recruited through a food bank and was matched with a social worker who used a range of interview, mapping and drawing exercises to document their experiences of adversity over a one-year period. The analysis sheds new light on how institutionalised and abusive relations with these families manifest in spatially located urban interactions. It is argued that poverty is misrecognised at the institutional level and that this nurtures structural violence in service provision interactions.

Keywords: beneficiary, landscape, systemic violence, urban poverty, welfare

Introduction

Recent financial crises have increased social stratification and the rate of growth in urban poverty. In New Zealand over the past two decades, for example, the incomes of the top 10 per cent of income earners

increased annually by an average of 2.5 per cent. The bottom 10 per cent had annual average increases in income of just 1.1 per cent (OECD, 2012). Over the same period, the proportion of the population officially

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living in poverty increased from approximately 6 per cent to 12 per cent of households. Locally and internationally, urban researchers have observed increased divisions between enfranchised and disenfranchised groups, with the latter having increasingly fewer resources (Dowler and O'Connor, 2012; Hodgetts *et al.*, 2011).

Whilst socioeconomic disparities have increased, urban scholars have reflected on the concurrent dismantling of government welfare systems and the concurrent introduction of punitive responses to poverty focused on the 'deficits' of individuals living in poverty (Bauman, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998; Dwyer, 2004). Welfare reforms introduced within many OECD countries are based on a neoliberal-orientated morality that emphasises self-reliance (Bauman, 2005; Standing, 2011). Today, families receiving welfare are subject to intensified scrutiny over their lifestyles in a manner that serves to individualise welfare as a form of 'dependency', treat poverty as a personal deficit (see Barnett *et al.*, 2007), and excuse current economic arrangements and actors of responsibility for increases in poverty (Boyer, 2006). Commentators have questioned the ideological shift in emphasis from notions of interdependence in society, and the corresponding provision of universal support to people in need, to an emphasis on *independence*. This shift involves a preoccupation with the 'maladjusted' behaviour of welfare recipients (Dwyer, 2004; Standing, 2011) and the justification of punitive approaches to individuals in poverty. A key concept in understanding this shift and associated 'welfare reforms' is that of conditionality (Bauman, 2005), or the requirement for those who receive welfare to engage in compliant behaviour and undertake 're-education' and other mandated tasks in return for the provision of financial and housing supports (Dwyer, 2004).

Conditionality is central to the efforts of the current New Zealand government to save NZ\$1.6 billion in welfare spending by reducing dependency on government assistance and producing more economically productive citizens.¹ Criteria for state-based support have been tightened and benefit payments are stopped if clients fail drug screenings, do not obtain regular fitness for work medical certificates, and if parents do not meet obligations, including having their children participate in education and health programmes (Standing, 2011). Rights to support have been decreased whilst obligations to act in particular ways have been increased (see Bourdieu, 1998; Dwyer, 2004). Correspondingly, sanctions against welfare recipients have increased two-fold on an annual basis since the current government took power in 2007.

Such welfare reforms exacerbate the dilemmas faced by families already living stressful and inadequately resourced lives (Duck, 2012). Research internationally reports increasingly dire conditions and dilemmas for low-income urban families (Boon and Farnsworth, 2011; Duck, 2012), who experience income insecurity and debt (Green, 2012; Landvogt, 2006), food insecurity (Dowler and O'Connor, 2012), social exclusion (Boon and Farnsworth, 2011) and both interpersonal and media stigma (Ballie, 2011; Barnett *et al.*, 2007; Jeppesen, 2009). Valuable insights have come from exploring each of these issues. A particularly detailed and disturbing picture comes when these issues are considered in concert. For instance, Green (2012) found that increased income, housing, electricity and food costs exacerbate experiences of hardship and trap families in inadequately resourced lives of debt, with rising living costs where they are forced to treat food as a discretionary item. To cope, families go hungry, turn off electricity and prevent children from participating in sports

and other social activities that would otherwise promote social inclusion (Boon and Farnsworth, 2011). Such research attests to the increasingly dire conditions faced by many families where relative income scarcity reduces social participation and adds misery to urban life.

Briefly, researchers have considered the increasingly stigmatising, discriminatory and punitive approaches to welfare provision found in contemporary neoliberal societies (Bauman, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998; Dwyer, 2004; Standing, 2011). This article moves out from there to explore the relevance of the concept of structural violence for extending understandings of the struggles facing families whose lives are textured by urban poverty. We document how systemically violent relationships are reproduced through local interactions between families and a particular government agency, Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ); this is the agency responsible for administering financial support to families in need and a key implementation location for welfare reforms. We focus on this agency because it received most comment from our participants, but it is only one of several agencies we could have used to illustrate our arguments here.

Structural Violence

The concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression (Farmer, 2004, p. 307).

Structural violence denotes methodical and often subtle processes through which social structures disadvantage and harm certain groups of people (Galtung, 1969). It is a form of violence that is applied 'as a matter of course', through the design and imposition of socioeconomic structures and associated institutional practices (Farmer, 1996).

Structural violence is often enacted through technocratic systems and procedures for 'managing' the poor, which have become normalised and taken-for-granted as simply 'how things are done around here' (Arendt, 1963/1969; Springer, 2012). In his *Critique of Violence*, Walter Benjamin (1921/1986) explored the tendency to obscure and overlook such institutionalised forms of violence. As Benjamin comments, those in power define what counts as violence. Their gaze is often on groups at the lower end of the social hierarchy, such as people living with the consequences of poverty, rather than themselves. Those in power also often fail to see how their actions can wreak havoc in the lives of the poor, since these actions are often imposed at arms-length (Galtung, 1969). Austerity measures and substantial cuts to social programmes and services designed to 'balance the books' are generally not named as violent acts, despite their disproportionate and negative impact on the bottom 10 per cent of income earners (Horton and Reed, 2011). Yet, as we will show, such acts epitomise an abusive relationship between the state and families in need, intensify the hardships families face and wound and degrade people.

In developing our understanding of structural violence, we draw insights from Hegel's (1807/1977) work on 'lordship and bondsman' (*sic*). Hegel wrote about structural relations in German feudal society and, in doing so, theorised ancient processes of domination that shape relationships between hierarchically dispersed groups in society (Cole, 2004). Hegel considered the function of institutionalised violence in forcing people at the bottom of the social hierarchy into bondage where they must subject much of their will and sovereignty to external control. In return they receive basic necessities, such as food and shelter, that the nobility take for granted. Like feudal bondsmen, today's poor are subject to similar

regulation. They are restricted in terms of their rights to cohabitate with intimate partners, move home or engage in certain forms of work and recreation. These processes of bonding come to embody violent relations through disciplinary technologies of monitoring, regulation, management and control of the poor by state institutions, such as WINZ (Cole, 2004).

Hegel (1807/1977) also foregrounds how those in power have defective understandings and misrecognition of those in bondage (Benjamin, 1921/1986). In their failure to recognise the ordeal of daily life for families in need (Jeppesen, 2009), and by relying primarily on victim-blaming and ideologically patterned stereotypes (Ballie, 2011; Barnett *et al.*, 2007), those in power position themselves as moral agents with the right to control the lives of families in need. Such misrecognition facilitates violence through tacit modes of domination in society (Arendt, 1963/1969; Bourdieu, 2001). Those in power fail to grasp the catastrophes that are created by their efforts to control the poor. As observed by Bourdieu, such structural violence generates anxiety, mistrust and conformity

the *structural violence* of unemployment, of insecure employment and of the *fear* provoked by the threat of losing employment ... those at the bottom ... hang on the arbitrary decision of a power responsible for the 'continued creation' of their existence (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 98–99).

It is crucial to note that structural violence is dynamic and multifaceted, and manifests in both face-to-face interactions that occur in urban spaces (such as the welfare office) and through representational politics that occur within symbolic spaces (such as policy documents and media reports) (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2012). Galtung (1969) distinguishes between 'indirect' (structural) and 'direct' (intimate)

violence. Both forms involve systemically patterned abuse. However, where intimate violence involves a specific perpetrator and victim, structural violence occurs through institutionalised racism, sexism and inequities in access to resources and life chances, and not necessarily the actions of a specific perpetrator

There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure (Galtung, 1969, 171).

Galtung (1969) also proposes that indirect and direct forms of violence are interconnected. Inequities in society, characteristic of structural violence, are intensified by the institutionalising of welfare reforms that shape daily interactions between families in need and WINZ staff, who are "simply doing their job" (Galtung, 1969, p. 180). We are interested in instances where such structural violence manifests in direct interactions between families in need and the state. We inform our analysis of the functioning of structural violence with general insights from work on intimate partner violence (Sackett and Saunders, 1999)² in order to reveal how indirect and direct forms of violence collapse when families in need seek assistance from the state.

Further reflecting the multifaceted nature of structural violence, the material and symbolic spaces in which it takes form are interwoven into a "landscape of despair" (Dear and Wolch, 1987) and oppression that is textured by current welfare reforms (Springer, 2011). For instance, policy and news discourses principally rely on problematic dualisms between the deserving and undeserving poor, welfare-dependent and active citizens, pride and shame, and dignity and stigmatisation when advocating for the provision or withholding of welfare support (Bauman, 2005; Barnett *et al.*, 2007; Dwyer, 2004). In this way, symbolic spaces

encompass processes of social distancing that render ‘the poor’ strange, defective and different from ‘productive members’ of society, and which work to normalise punitive practices (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2011). Beneficiaries are regularly depicted as abjects (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2012), as estranged (Simmel, 1903/1997), and as transgressors of social conventions who let society down; they are fraudulent and waste ‘hardworking’ taxpayers’ dollars (Bauman, 2005; Jeppesen, 2009). Single mothers are subject to particular moral scrutiny, considered as promiscuous and a burden on the state and, by proxy, on the rest of ‘us’ (Ballie, 2011; Barnett *et al.*, 2007; Boyer, 2006). Thus, processes of estrangement manifest prominently in the questioning of the competencies and morality of ‘the poor’ in terms of how their meagre funds are spent. Reflecting on such broad representational trends, Bourdieu (1998, p. 43) writes sarcastically that “the poor are not just immoral, alcoholic and degenerate, they are stupid”, and consequently need to be managed, re-educated and subjected to intense budgetary scrutiny and control.

Binary neoliberal rhetoric, texturing both symbolic and material sites within the welfare landscape, is disciplinary and constitutive. It functions to categorise poor people so that various economic and coercive forms of control can be bought directly to bear (Jeppesen, 2009). Ultimately, negative depictions of the poor in symbolic spaces contribute to social distance between hierarchically dispersed groups and can function to undermine the social contract that supports universal welfare initiatives. This occurs within the material locales across which families conduct their everyday lives and seek assistance under neoliberalism (see Hodgetts *et al.*, 2011; Standing, 2011).

Neoliberalism motivates increased socioeconomic inequalities, employment insecurities, welfare reforms, austerity measures, the individualising of poverty and punitive

responses to need (Bourdieu, 1998). Geographers have called for close readings of particular local spaces and practices to reveal the influence of the extra-local neoliberalising of society (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Springer, 2012). The disciplinary logic of neoliberalism can be challenged by foregrounding the violent consequences of this regime in particular located moments (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Springer, 2012). The concept of structural violence enables us to explore links between the *local* (micro) situations experienced by families living with urban poverty and the *general* (macro) levels of society (Duck, 2012). A key consideration is how general (societal) conditions and relationships are reproduced via particular (local) and spatially located interactions (Lefebvre, 1947/1991). In this regard, our work is informed by Simmel’s (1903/1997) ‘principle of emergence’ of social phenomena and his orientation towards looking locally in order to understand systemic elements of the socio-cultural world within which people reside and work to make do. Our analytical gaze turns to how violent neoliberal structures are reproduced through interpersonal interactions that generate hardship for people in need. As Farmer (1996, pp. 261–262) writes “social forces ranging from poverty to racism become *embodied* as individual experiences”. We draw on Springer’s (2012) proposal that the abusive relationships implicated within current socioeconomic relations manifest in identifiable moments, and in the texturing of particular places. We document how structural violence manifests locally in the practices of WINZ and how that bonds people living in poverty in a dehumanising manner.

The Family 100 Project

Government welfare has historically buffered families against the harshest consequences of urban poverty. With the

dismantling of government welfare provisions (Bourdieu, 1998), non-governmental social services have a greater role to play in meeting the basic human needs of families and in advocating for the addressing of structural causes of poverty. This research is located within one such organisation, the Auckland City Mission (ACM), and seeks to develop alternative understandings of families in need and to promote initiatives that better meet their needs.

The Family 100 project explores how families who have been accessing a food bank with high regularity make sense of, and respond to, their impoverished situations. Households, contextualised within their familial and service networks, are the unit of analysis. We removed food insecurity³ for one year for 100 householders in return for them speaking frankly with social workers about their experiences every two weeks over one year. Each participant was matched with a social worker, and used a range of mapping and drawing exercises to document their conversations with the social workers. Reflecting the gendered nature of poverty, 88 per cent of these representatives were women. Participating families were selected to be representative of families regularly accessing the foodbank; the cohort consisted of 40 per cent Maori, 25 per cent Pacific Islander, 22 per cent European and 13 per cent Asian and other minority groups. These percentages reflect the over-representation of Maori, Pacific peoples and ethnic minorities in poverty in New Zealand. The research team met with the social workers every week to conduct training, collaboratively develop research materials, review participant responses and ensure continuity in the project.

Materials for analysis consisted of discussion notes from the fortnightly interactions, various participant mappings and drawings, and bi-monthly recorded interviews. The concept of *phronesis* (practically

orientated knowledge regarding how to address issues) (Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2012) was central to our analytical approach. People experiencing hardship have a stock of practical experiential knowledge about their situations (*phronesis*) that other people lack. Such experiential wisdom is not simply cognitive in nature; it is embodied through feelings of humiliation, frustration, fear and anxiety that can manifest around interactions with unsympathetic institutions in particular locales (see Bourdieu, 1998). Scholarly engagements with participant knowledge of what happens in interactions between institutions and families are centrally important for improving these interactions and in challenging the neoliberal structures which are reproduced through them. To go beyond simply 'giving voice' to participants, we drew on theoretical knowledge and abductive reasoning to interpret and present the 'best' possible explanations based on family accounts. We brought local insights and examples from families into conversation with conceptual abstractions, and then subjected these experiences and theories to critical scrutiny. This approach enabled us to demonstrate how a myriad of structurally patterned practices and relationships are interconnected and embedded in the everyday lives of families in need and in the emplaced practices of agencies responsible for helping them.

We informed our analysis of structural violence with criteria commonly used to screen for intimate partner violence. Our participants' accounts of their interactions with WINZ are replete with examples reflecting the criteria used to identify abusive intimate relationships,⁴ including a lack of sympathy, restrictions on personal autonomy, intolerance, punitive responses to mistakes, detailed monitoring, economic control and personal criticism. As in abusive intimate partner relationships, our

participants' interactions with WINZ staff frequently result in mistrust, fear, helplessness, reduced dignity and, ultimately, avoidance. Referring to these thematic links enabled us to identify, defamiliarise and surface institutionalised inequities in power that have become central to violent state interactions with families in need.

Navigating the Urban Service Landscape

The primary focus of our analysis is on what happens in the WINZ office, but our analysis extends more broadly to identify the chaotic urban service landscape within which the WINZ office is located. From the outside, chaos is often misrecognised as a characteristic of families in need. Less attention is given to how families have to operate in a landscape of diverse, uncoordinated and disordered service provision. This 'landscape of despair' (Dear and Wolch, 1987) encompasses government agencies, non-government-organisations and free market 'entrepreneurs' who run clothing trucks and finance companies that charge exploitative rates of interest. It is useful to think of everyday life for these families as an 'obstacle course' that must be navigated (Boon and Farnsworth, 2011).

The cluster of services, within which the WINZ office is located, does not constitute a coherent welfare system. Rather, it is the clients who create a 'functional' system through their efforts to navigate the variety of agencies and to link these into a coherent provision of resource and support. The actions of families weave specific locales (for example, public housing estates, the WINZ office, budgeting services, the ACM and food bank) together into a geography of everyday life.

The resulting landscape of despair is textured from outside by dominant

constructions of 'beneficiaries' and the principle of conditionality. For example, the dichotomy between active working citizens and undeserving poor is reflected in a typical assumption (misrecognition) that families have time on their hands (Dwyer, 2004). This misrecognition of the serious difficulties of getting by and the time-consuming nature of sustaining everyday life for these families, means that it becomes acceptable practice for WINZ to send beneficiaries back out into the chaos to obtain additional documents to prove hardship and reach compliance with obligations set out in government policy. One participant expressed this succinctly

It's the running around. I'm pretty organised and even if you do have ... the paperwork that's required, there is still one thing that they will demand you get ... So you've got to rebook your appointment, use up more gas to go and run around, or more money for the buses (Hayley).

Disrespect for the time of families has become normative in this landscape. Time-wasting overlooks the need for families to be engaged in more constructive activities

Firstly it's my time. I don't like going there, wasting all those hours ... I've got something else I like to do (Leona).

Parents report having less time for children because they have to navigate the chaotic landscape.

Central to time-wasting practices is the condition that emergency grants for food or housing can only be made with evidence of a budget audit of a family's accounts to ensure that they are not wasting money on alcohol or cigarettes. It is assumed within policy documents and news reports that poor people cannot budget and therefore require professional assistance to ensure

that they spend money appropriately, in a morally sanctioned manner. As Landvogt (2006, p. 2) notes: “There is commonly confusion between financial competence and financial difficulty”. People living in poverty have to be good money managers, although they are vulnerable to exploitation and crises that get them into greater trouble. They simply do not have access to enough money to get by. Having to move between the WINZ office and budgeting services is a frustrating pathway within the service landscape that builds resentment

If you need help with WINZ or anything you’ve gotta go through the budgeter ... They just write down where all your money goes and come up with the conclusion, you’re short. Well, I already know I’m short! But WINZ doesn’t care—they get the budget report and still they see that there’s not enough each week, but it doesn’t matter, they just want that bit of paper to prove it ... I hate WINZ. I find them really hard to deal with ... When you go in to see someone and they’re giving you advice about something that they’ve got absolutely no idea about ... I get quite upset ... They know that I don’t get much money and yet they’re trying to throw things at me, like trying to put ideas into my head (Shelley).

Shelley’s comments regarding the way WINZ staff impose their ideas on her reflect the personal ridicule, criticism of behaviour, ignoring of needs and control that are characteristic of psychological abuse in intimate relationships (Sackett and Saunders, 1999). Such accounts refer to one aspect of a set of spatial relations between the WINZ office and budgeting service. The ‘run around’ multiplies when one considers the myriad of other relationships with, for example, foodbanks (when applications to WINZ for food grants are refused they must seek charitable aid), or when the services of an

advocate are needed to ensure that clients can access their entitlements from WINZ.

We have focused here on budgeting to illustrate the issue of misrecognition and how the assumptions of groups higher in the social hierarchy texture urban spaces for and response to families in need. This has important implications for families when they lack financial capacity to respond effectively to unexpected events. Participants recounted how a lack of understanding, reflected in WINZ protocols for responding to them, manifests in a lack of flexibility in managing unanticipated events

Like things happen with your kids ... A trip comes up or you need a new book or he’s grown out of his uniform and then you’ve gotta put money aside for that ... WINZ officers don’t understand that. Or funerals come up or something unexpected comes up and then you need to go for help or you might need a food grant ... It’s when they turn you down after getting all your documents and everything, that’s when I get annoyed about WINZ (Ofa).

Such extracts reflect a common participant view that WINZ is out of touch with their lived realities and this results in their access to basic necessities being over-restricted. Despite having to run around to get ‘all your documents’ help is conditional on the perceptions of WINZ staff.

Tightening our analytical gaze, the very architecture of the WINZ office reveals further insights into the materialising of the abusive relationship between the state and beneficiaries and associated attitudes towards families in need. Participants propose that the WINZ space is not welcoming and families have to wait for appointments for several hours with no basic facilities. The WINZ office is an emotionally charged negative space (“Ugly WINZ”, Kali) where clients often feel humiliated by how they

are treated, and in having others know their personal business due to a lack of privacy. The lack of care and sympathy towards clients is reflected in the layout of the WINZ office and in the associated institutionalised practices that occur there. When reflecting on the architecture and how this space could be improved, Charlotte states

They could have a little kids' play area. Maybe those plastic screens between each cubicle where you sit because then not everyone's gonna hear your conversation... I don't want everyone seeing me cry ... WINZ is a last resort for a lot of people ... Toilet facilities, especially if you've got a little kid that needs to go ... Literally crappy ... You could be sitting and waiting for your appointment, your kid really needs to go and you're gonna walk out of there, across the road, go through the mall, get to the toilet then come all the way back to oh, your appointment was 10, 15 minutes ago. I've had to rebook an appointment just because I needed to take my little boy to the toilet ... There's a lot of people who urinate on the street outside (Charlotte).

Lack of responsiveness to family needs manifests in the inhumane structuring of a setting without toilets or a private space for the disclosure of personal, often traumatic, information. The absence of basic architectural features such as toilets reflects how structural violence manifests locally through the enactment of emplaced and embodied relations of power and subordination.

Further, the material presented earlier illustrates how current welfare reforms texture the service landscape and are embodied within the movement and emplacement of people in need. The 'run around' is an institutionalisation of the violence of control, which forces the movement of bodies across the urban environment. Beneficiary bodies are regulated and sent out from the

WINZ office in search of evidence to warrant charity from the state. These bodies are constructed, surveilled and disciplined within the social service landscape as a reflection of broader policy and media discourses (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2011). Boyer (2006) has noted how the body and issues of scale are central to the tactics of welfare reform, linking the macro scale of society to the micro scale of the body. This reproduces a focus on individual behaviour while the social structures causing increased inequity in society are ignored. Time-consuming routines and power imbalances frustrate families and add to the hardship of poverty.

Control, Monitoring and Restricting Access to Necessities

Abusive relationships are characterised by the abuser controlling their victims, withholding finances and basic necessities such as food and shelter. Such abuse is associated with the normalising of practices of domination, humiliation and denial. When talking about their experiences, our participants invoke such issues of abuse. Their local interactions with WINZ are bound up in structurally violent relationships of inequity that mandate overtly controlling practices that regulate their access to basic necessities. As a condition of financial aid, these families are subjected to intense scrutiny, budgeting and parenting classes, and drug screening. Through processes of bonding, they must submit to institutional power in order to gain access to basic necessities of life (Cole, 2004).

When seeking assistance, families are met with detailed scrutiny, cynicism and a lack of sympathy. For example, Charlotte refers to an experience of seeking a hardship grant, and having WINZ staff question the necessity of her purchasing everyday items

To the point of knowing where your last cent went and why did you need to get this and that ... You could say shopping, but at the end of the day you don't eat everything you buy. Toiletries aren't cheap. We make tooth-paste last three weeks ... After my son's accident, we went straight from rehab to WINZ. I needed a food grant ... He was all bandaged up and not quite with it. We saw a WINZ worker who asked "Why do you need help?". "Look at my son" ... He still had the drip in his hand. I told him what had happened to him. My son sat there listening to it all and started crying like a baby cos he got scared because I started raising my voice. I felt quite degraded to the point that this WINZ worker turned around and said, "Wasn't he looking when he crossed the road?" ... I walked out with nothing (Charlotte).

In this particular interaction, Charlotte invokes the added pressure created by her son being run over by a car and now having brain damage. Monitoring and control extends out from the purchase of household goods to restraints on the allocation of resources for parents to care for an injured child.

WINZ is presented as a reactive abuser who must be placated in order to avoid further abusive acts of retaliation. Participants felt betrayed in that they try to appease WINZ staff and build up trust and co-operation by complying with stated obligations. Regardless, they report being disempowered and having little control in terms of their interactions with WINZ. As Springer (2012) notes, "violence is not intended to be negotiable, its intention is control and its functioning coercive". In a similar manner to a domestic abuser, WINZ staff are presented by participants as being quick to punish transgressions whilst being unaccountable for their own errors

Work and Income are so quick to jump on you if you don't meet their obligations, but when

it's the other way around its ok. You gotta go and grovel to them and cry and shit (Jade).

Even when in acute need, many participants report being denied adequate support as a matter of course. For example, Tara was worried about "being on the streets with my kids and being pregnant and diabetic as well". In this context, Tara talks about a lack of adequate support from WINZ in meeting the basic necessities in life

Because if I go to WINZ: "This is the situation, I need this, I need that". They said, "Oh, well, it's your own fault if you struggle more". And they decline it ... You're asking WINZ for \$150 because food is so expensive and then they'll turn around and say, "I'm sorry, we can only do \$100". I'm saying, "Oh, my God". I told them the price of the milk powder is \$33 and I give them a letter as well from hospital saying that my daughter was premature labour. And that \$100 was only a packet of nappies, one formula and my kids' lunch for the week ... Sometimes you just cry. When your kids are sick you just feel so helpless and you can't give them what they need ... Can't take them to the park or anything because there's hardly no food to pack to take ... WINZ expect me to run here and there and yet I told them, "I just finished giving birth. I can't run here and there. Please, I'm already over my limits". I had my two girls in the car and I had to sleep at Seaside Park with a newborn... Then Child Youth and Family Services might think I'm a bad Mum, with a new-born and nine-year-old and take my kids (Tara).

Many families report indifferent and unhelpful attitudes amongst WINZ staff when seeking support.

People go there for good reason, because there are a lot of things that they are entitled to and those people they just holding it back like it's their own money (Solomon).

Our participants invoke a lack of understanding from WINZ staff of the realities of their needs, which leads to further punitive responses and hardship, such as children being removed from families who cannot feed them.

A key issue in economic control and a lack of transparency is the lack of disclosure by WINZ to clients about their entitlements. Participants drew attention to this imbalance in that they are accountable, but the agency is not

WINZ never say what our entitlements are. If you don't ask, you won't get it ... The transparency of some of the services of their policies and what they do, it's not happening ... But then they are on our backs for full accountability ... That's where the non-transparency's happening. But if it's on my part it's transparent (Paul).

Client relationships with WINZ are routinely described by participants as unequal, disrespectful and abusive. Clients are reprimanded, for example, if they are late for appointments, do not produce the necessary documentation to prove their compliance with various conditions for support, or seek autonomy in the form of choosing to purchase basic household goods. Conversely, WINZ staff can keep clients waiting for hours beyond their appointment times. Our participants invoke a relationship in which they struggle for recognition from WINZ staff as human beings who deserve respect.

Hardship is exacerbated by a cynical non-response to material and psychological needs of families by WINZ. For example, when seeking special needs grants for food to feed their families, they are re-victimised

I told her about the kids, their ages ... She asked how much. I said "I really need \$150". She sat there at the computer and whatnot and

goes, "Look, I'm only gonna give you \$40". I had proof of where my money went right down to petrol receipts. She said, "\$40". I said "I cannot feed my kids". She goes, "Do your kids eat rice? Do they eat soup?" ... "Degrading, it was completely degrading ... To the point of knowing where your last cent went and why did you need to get this and that? Especially going for food grants—they wanna know where all your money went to (Charlotte).

Disciplinary technology is evident when participants are required to attend the WINZ space with their budget forms and other documents; they can comply and still be denied adequate support. Being placed under the microscope and constantly examined by agencies can undermine a sense of self-worth among beneficiaries.

The WINZ office is a specific locale in which the symbolic meanings that shape the enactment of 'support' for families in need are crystallised through emplaced practices. Like the sites for domestic abuse, the WINZ office comes to be associated with strong emotional feelings of exclusion, fear, foreboding, dislike, disrespect and anxiety. The everyday practices of abuse in this site prevent a sense of belonging, attachment and control among welfare recipients. The principle of conditionality becomes very apparent in this space, manifested in staff–client interactions where 'beneficiaries' must demonstrate financial restraint, the ability to live within their means, and spend money in morally sanctioned ways. They are denied discretion and choice in a neoliberal context where citizens are expected to earn rights through achieving economic independence (Standing, 2011).

Criticism, Fear, Mistrust and Reduced Dignity

Personal criticism is a prominent characteristic of abusive intimate relationships. Such

emotional abuse manifests through judgemental comments regarding people's circumstances and an unsympathetic and hostile demeanour on the part of WINZ staff. Much was made by our participants of the disinterested demeanour of staff, which along with direct criticism, leads to fear and mistrust

I find WINZ very judgemental. They look at the computer screen, say you've been in 10 times in the last six months and you're instantly: "Oh, you've been here too much". It's, "Do you think I'd be here if I didn't need help?" The experiences with them—I've cried in front of them. I've lost it in the office more than a couple of times and no-one even gives a tissue. Is there any compassion in this office? ... They should listen to what you've got to say and not judge you ... I hate having to go. It's traumatising. I think about it the day before, "Oh, I have to go to WINZ". I'm dreading it. Then you have to go and kind of beg and I don't feel like I should have to do that. It should be, "I've got the facts here" ... But they still make you feel, "Well, we're helping you too much" (Tammy).

The lack of compassion evident in such extracts extends to accounts of WINZ failing to simply express sympathy, compassion and to be helpful by informing beneficiaries of other spaces where they can access basic resources that WINZ have failed to provide.

Almost all of our participants developed a fear of WINZ staff being judgemental, misunderstanding them and seeking to control their lives. Some internalise the societal assumptions texturing the WINZ office and the abusive interactions with staff, and become

Bloody depressed to the point of doing damage to myself ... Because you feel like you're inadequate and you can't do anything right for your kids ... Having to go back in,

to punish yourself even more ... There are no excuses for them to hold back on your benefit (Amelia).

Individuals in these circumstances can end up questioning their own competence much like domestic abuse survivors, becoming anxious and depressed. The psychological impact of recent efforts to manage the poor promotes low self-esteem, fear, shame and guilt (Bauman, 2005). Fear of the other person (or agency) is a particularly revealing indicator of an abusive relationship, often associated with a sense of desperation. Because of the meanings participants have attached to the WINZ office and the power relations emanating from it, fear of abuse is emplaced and embodied.

Several participants spoke of having to "Just shut up and suffer through it" (Eva). Criticisms discourage beneficiaries from trying to access their entitlements, so that they avoid further abuse, depression and anxiety

I have anxiety when I know I have to go to WINZ, so I'd much rather go and find help from another agency. Not be questioned and put down ... I'm afraid of the emotional roller-coaster that I'm gonna face having to justify everything (Mavis).

Requiring people to relive private and painful experiences continuously in order to gain access to basic resources reflects a controlling and abusive approach to the provision of welfare. Michelle felt re-victimised when having to tell her story time and time again

Do you know how it feels to repeat that I'm on anti-depressants? How many times have I repeated that, yes. I tried committing suicide. "Yes, I was raped by my father". It's pathetic and it makes me hate them ... I'm too scared to go to WINZ to put a bit more on my bills, so we can have one heater on ... to warm my

children. I can't go in there ... because it's not worth repeating my life. They're that callous (Michelle).

A dominant source of fear for participants lay in reliving painful experiences in order to gain resources and having constantly to justify why assistance is warranted. Many participants withdrew as much as possible from WINZ. Individuals in abusive relationships often avoid raising certain topics out of fear of angering their partner. Many participants in our research spoke of being fearful that they would be declined when asking service providers for help with basic necessities such as food, power and accommodation. Emotional responses from having been denied these necessities in the past were often invoked in references to feelings of anxiety, embarrassment and being overwhelmed. Opting out of interactions with WINZ, like leaving abusive intimate relationships, can be frightening and have negative consequences. Opting out means that families become more vulnerable to loan sharks and other parasitic 'services' because the need for resources to meet basic survival requirements has not disappeared.

Having to beg for food and charity is a demeaning experience for increasing numbers of people, both those living on benefits and the working poor (Dowler and O'Connor, 2012). In such instances, structural violence is reproduced through dignity-stripping interactions with the state benefit office. Human dignity is a relational process through which we reflect value towards others through our actions and language at particular times and in particular places. Dignity is undermined by participants having to beg for necessities and in being positioned as objects of scorn in these interactions

It's humiliating sometimes having to go in there and say, "I have no food, I have no

clothes, please can you help me?". In this time, at the moment, asking for help with just the basic everyday things is humiliating (Maxine).

Families felt that WINZ stripped them of dignity and they just wanted to be treated "with respect and kindness" (Evelyn).

I think they could just show you more respect ... They don't show you much respect and dignity (Nicole).

Our participants recount undignified interactions with WINZ that take much away from those in welfare bondage. A desire for an equal respectful relationship with service providers is the overwhelming response from participants. They voice the desire to overcome misrecognition (Bourdieu, 2001) of themselves in a society where families in need are responded to as errant objects to be forced into compliance within the very system that creates many of their dilemmas in life.

Our participants' accounts reflect Lefebvre's (1947/1991) observation that spaces are socio-political products of economic and legal frameworks and associated everyday institutional practices. Urban spaces such as the WINZ office contain emotions of fear and anxiety that are linked to interactions and institutional practices that occur there. WINZ space tells families what (little) they are worth, and are textured by the politics of poverty and exclusion (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2011). In this way, the space is a medium through which violent relations are reproduced.

Conclusion

It is supposed that each evil should be cured at the spot where it breaks out, and no thought is taken for the place where it actually originates and whence it spreads its influence (von Goethe, 1809/1971, p. 67).

We have explored family accounts of interactions with WINZ to reveal the [dys]functioning of relations of bondage between a state institution and families in need. When the exemplars presented here are read metonymically, our focus shifts outwards from the interactions of particular families with WINZ to the broader structures of violence at play in society today. We can see how specific interpersonal interactions constitute moments in the reproduction of violently systemically patterned relations of power. The banality of structural violence is evident on a more intimate scale when WINZ staff carry out the dictates of a neoliberal society through the use of draconian eligibility criteria for welfare support, fail to disclose actual entitlements for support and ignore the additional hardships caused for families.

WINZ staff feature in our participants' accounts as socially distant (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2011) and as only willing to engage in the most rudimentary of human connections with families in need. However, the emphasis we place on understanding interactions between beneficiaries and WINZ staff systemically is important in avoiding the conclusion that abuse is reducible solely to the personal intent of individual staff members. WINZ staff are faced with the near-impossible task of minimising the 'fallout' of increasing inequalities in society and are subject to technologies of control such as key performance indicators, which also bond them in reproducing a violent system (see Galtung, 1969). Our participants mention how many staff do what they can to help desperate clients, but are hampered by institutional protocols and restraints. Institutionalised methodical procedures work to harm families 'as a matter of course' (Galtung, 1969; Springer, 2012). Arendt (1963/1969) notes how technocratic forms of control can become increasingly dehumanised, mechanised and unaccountable to the people they hurt

In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted ... For the rule by Nobody is not no-rule ... we have a tyranny without a tyrant (Arendt, 1963/1969, p. 81).

People harmed are left with increasingly fewer avenues for redress when their human rights are transgressed (Dowler and O'Connor, 2012). In New Zealand today, families are now often forced to rely on advocates to gain their statutory entitlements.

Our analysis documents how families in need are treated unfairly by a state institution tasked with their care. Unsympathetic responses from WINZ staff reflect the broader shifts evident in many OECD countries with a history of government-funded welfare provisions (Bauman, 2005; Bordieu, 1998). Practices central to managing the poor in these countries now infantilise beneficiaries and consume their time with demeaning and trivial activities, such as repeatedly having to present household budgets when it is clear that these families do not have enough income to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and electricity (Boon and Farnsworth, 2011; Dowler and O'Connor, 2012; Duck, 2012; Green, 2012). Interactions in the WINZ office reflect the power of the state to bond families in need through the imposition of conditions and the restriction of access to basic necessities. Thus, our analysis confirms Bauman's (2005) observation that the principle of obligation for the state to ensure the welfare of citizens beyond basic survival needs and the dignity of vulnerable people has been transgressed.

State agencies are increasingly operated as agencies of repression rather than care (Lawson, 2009). Contemporary interactions between families and WINZ dehumanise the former, rendering them as 'problems'

or 'strangers' to be regulated and managed at a distance, rather than as fellow human beings to be supported and embraced. This lack of care perpetuates inequities and discrimination (Lawson, 2009), transforming settings for daily familial life into a 'landscape of despair', characterised by welfare retrenchment (Dear and Wolch, 1987). We need to transform these settings into a *landscape of care* that is characterised by inclusive politics that embrace rather than punish vulnerable people (Lawson, 2009). This requires us to support the rehumanising of families in need as more than treacherous strangers, and to document the violence of a system that no longer cares.

Structural violence is a useful concept that orientates us towards the brutal nature of neoliberalism and the institutional responses to families lower down the social hierarchy. Employing this concept, it becomes possible to see violence as more than a series of isolated events. Violence is an ongoing, patterned, emplaced and embodied aspect of larger structural systems of inequity in society (Springer, 2012). Societal-level arrangements shape institutional practices that manifest and texture local settings and the bodies in interaction there. Structural violence is a crucial concept in that it makes issues of poverty and service responses of concern to us all as citizens, rather than just to those facing the abuse and domination from the system that we all tolerate. A core issue here is how poverty is misrecognised from an institutional perspective, as a temporary issue affecting defective and maladjusted individuals. This leads to a primary focus on addressing personal deficits rather than the structural causes of poverty and associated breaches of human rights (Dowler and O'Connor, 2012; Standing, 2011). Poverty must be reframed to foreground its structural nature in increasingly stratified societies. We need to name systemic violence and work to address it, just

as we have named intimate partner violence decades ago. We need structural changes that readjust our maladjusted and violent society, and its chaotic welfare provisions. A starting point might be by having beneficiaries involved in the redesign of WINZ offices, so as to signal belonging and inclusion, rather than subordination and exclusion.

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Notes

1. See: www.national.org.nz/welfare-reforms.aspx, retrieved 20/6/12.
2. See: www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic_violence_abuse_types_signs_causes_effects.htm.
3. For some readers, providing food may raise ethical concerns about cohesion and conditionality. For us, the primary concern is the need for reciprocity in research. We wanted to give something directly back to families in recognition of their participation in the project. When we discussed the issue, the families appreciated receiving the food parcels, but were not participating for the parcels. They participated to 'have their say' in a society that silences them.
4. See note 2.

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