

# **Making Work Pay: Policymakers Perspectives on “Working for Families”**

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# The Research

- Three year HRC/FRST-funded project
- Reducing Inequalities: Analysing the Effect of Government Policy on Whānau Ora
- Aim: to explore the effects on whānau of the government's Working for Families (WFF) policy and determine whether the policy has contributed to the achievement of whānau ora

# Background to WFF Policy

A number of key objectives in the WFF package (Cabinet Office, 2004) including:

- ◆ Making work pay
- ◆ Ensuring income adequacy
- ◆ The achievement of a social assistance system that supports people into work

# Research Design

- A mixed methods approach
- Four stages of data collection:
  - ◆ Key informant interviews/literature review
  - ◆ Identifying households within the THNR dataset who qualify for WFF
  - ◆ Analysing changes in households over time
  - ◆ Face-to-face qualitative interviews with 40 of these whānau

# Progress Thus Far

- Literature review
- In-depth analysis of the WFF policy to identify the characteristics of families targeted by the policy
- Interviews with key informants
- Identification of households in the THNR dataset whose characteristics qualify them for assistance under the WFF policy

# Key Informant Interviews

- Interviews were conducted with politicians, senior policymakers, academics and advocates
- Participants were those that had a critical role in the development of the policy or had made substantial contribution to discussion on the policy
- Four of the ten participants were Māori

# Results

## Four themes

- Context for the policy and background to the policy
- Philosophical values underpinning the policy
- Intent of the policy
- Changes through implementation

# Results

- Policy context

*If you think of all the things that went the other way through the 1980s and 1990s, there was GST which is regressive against poor people, there was two tax cuts during the National's period in the 1990's, both of which favoured higher income groups. This package reversed that trend and for a one-off intervention, is quite historic.*

Key Informant 6

# Results

- Values explicit in the policy

*I think there's a stereotype view that says you give the poor money and it won't make any difference because they don't know how to use it and all that sort of stuff. It's just this incredible fear of giving poor people enough money because then they might continue to enjoy their lifestyle.*

Key Informant 4

# Results

- Values explicit in the policy

*It's a collective issue that people have kids and we want them all fed properly and clothed properly and housed properly and that's what countries do.*

Key Informant 2

# Results

- Intent of the policy

*So to be realistic, it [the policy] set out to substantially reduce child poverty and it did that big time, it delivered and there's just a heap of evidence ... it was, as I was saying before, the largest redistribution of income downwards in three decades.*

Key Informant 6

# Results

- Changes as the policy was implemented

*It was called “family support”, “bridge to work”, all these kinds of things, so we had all our core messages were around these kinds of positive things that this would do ... but at one sweeping media conference it was changed to “tax credit” ... because the Prime Minister felt that tax credit ... sounded a whole lot better than talking about family support and return to work.*

Key Informant 2

# Summary

- Increased researcher understanding of policy
- Knowledge used to inform the qualitative interviews
- Need for additional Māori-focused research to be done in the area

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