

Chapter 13

A Feminist Contribution to Social Work

Social Work Through the Eyes of Women

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Our primary intention is to make women visible as clients and as workers. This involves a restructuring of thought and values; women must become valued in and for themselves. Making women visible also involves a greater understanding of the conflicts experienced by women, and the demands made upon them, both as clients and as workers. It also involves challenging current thinking about client groups and types of problems facing social workers.

(Hanmer and Statham, 1988)

This chapter examines social work and practice from the point of view of women. It identifies a number of key feminist principles which can be used to guide social work practice. Our views have developed out of a combination of our own research, experience and reading of the literature.

In the 1980s, feminist methods of intervention in the social services were 'named' in New Zealand, largely by community workers involved in developing the Women's Refuge movement, and providing women with access to abortion. Some of these women then came into tertiary

education to get their paper qualifications as social and community workers. They raised questions about women's issues in the curriculum for social work students. In some courses woman-centred material in both the academic and in practice settings found a small place, but feminist social work theory and practice models were scarce up until the late 1980s. Now there are many more resources becoming available every year, reflecting considerable advances in thinking in this area (Broome, A., Munford, R. and Nash, M., 1992; Mafle'o, T., Munford, R. and Nash, M., 1994).

A review of feminist literature shows that there is a generally accepted set of principles which constitute a baseline for the practice of feminist social work. These complement, and in some ways differ from, the standard social work ethical principles because of their underlying feminist analysis which acknowledges the conflict and unequal power relations that exist between men and women. Feminism is about recognising that women, by virtue of their sex, are discriminated against and thereby oppressed. Once conceded, this point entails action on the part of every social worker who acknowledges their professional code of ethics. The sort of action likely to be considered appropriate will be in keeping with whatever feminist analysis is being used. Theory informs strategy. In this way, social policy and social work are intertwined.

At the same time, feminist social workers must front up to the challenge made by Sue Wise in her account of 'becoming a feminist social worker' (1990). Sue makes the point that in the end, the statutory social worker's primary responsibility is to protect the most vulnerable members of society – sometimes women, but more frequently children – and to ensure that no matter how terrible or extenuating the circumstances, the adults she is working with take as much responsibility for their actions (or inactions) as is reasonable. Similarly, Beatrix Campbell (1988) in her account of the Cleveland case comes to the spine-chilling conclusion that society, when faced with acknowledging the extent of men's abuse of children, prefers instead to leave children to bear that terrible burden in the dark.

Closer to home, the authors of the Report of the Victim Support Task Force 1992 make similar points:

We never foresaw the consequences that the researching of the report would have for us. We did not anticipate the horrific

details we would be exposed to, the fear we felt at times, the sameness of the stories told to us by women whose life experiences cut across racial, religious, and class backgrounds. Over time we became familiar with the scripts of battering and the commonplaceness of women's terror' ... what we have learned easiest and best are the excuses and justifications for domestic violence which the justice system readily accepts, thus often rendering spousal abuse consequence-free.

(Task Force, 1992: vi).

Touching base with our reality

A few facts and figures speak for themselves as to the serious and challenging situation we face in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where there are many Women's Refuge houses run by the National Collective of Women's Refuges. In 1992 their annual statistics showed that:

- Women's Refuges provided help to 7,221 women and 8,963 children.
- Refuge clients were divided equally between Maori and non-Maori, while 9.5 per cent of clients were Pacific Islanders.
- In the same year, the police attended 21,093 domestic disputes.

(Department of Statistics, 1993: 169 and 171)

These figures help to explain the fears of women for their personal safety. Rape and attempted rape offences reported to the police show a sevenfold increase over the last 20 years' (Department of Statistics, 1993: 168).

We know that services for women are overstretched. For example, trial court convictions for sexual violation doubled between 1986 and 1990, waiting times for appointments for sexual abuse counselling can be from two weeks to three months (Ministry of Women's Affairs, CEDAW, 1992). Te Kakano o te Whanau (founded in 1984) works for Maori women against sexual abuse and violence. Their programmes raise awareness and give women assertiveness skills for the future. In 1991, 2,874 women used the service (Ministry of Women's Affairs, CEDAW).

Services for women, while supported by state funding, are under constant financial pressure, accompanied by expectations as to what services those funders are prepared to countenance. Independence comes at a price for women and our organisations.

Practice principles

For the purposes of this chapter we have chosen five practice principles: analysis, integration, affirmation, empowerment and action-reflection. We have illustrated these with a case study. There is a consensus of opinion among recent authors about what constitutes feminist practice principles (Nash, 1989; Wood-Wetzel, 1986). We have taken and adapted Nash's earlier framework of feminist principles for social work practices (Nash, 1987). In themselves, these may be used by a variety of workers, not all of whom espouse feminism, but we maintain that it is the analysis of women's position in the societies and cultures we live in that informs the principles and which gives them their distinctive nature.

Analysis

First and foremost is analysis. From this stems the vision and energy to take action. Fundamentally, 'feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women' (Hartsock, 1981: 35). All social work is carried out from some perspective, frequently one which reflects the dominant culture. Good social work practitioners will recognise the basic assumptions which underpin their practice. Depending on which perspective feminist social workers adopt, their approach will emphasise particular aspects of intervention. We would agree that:

What social work and feminists want from humanity requires the reclamation of 'woman culture' – the traditions and experience of females in the private sphere and their reintegration into the public world. This is to suggest the model of society social workers seek requires the acceptance and valuing of aspects of our humanity that feminists argue have been labelled and assigned to the 'other' and thus relegated to the private sphere.

(Collins, 1986: 217)

There are a number of feminist theoretical positions, and according to which feminist analysis is used, different sites of women's oppression are identified. For example, the priorities of white feminists are different from those of Maori women who recognise and challenge their dual oppressions (Irwin, 1992). This means that there is no single feminist analysis. Women's oppression is recognised in different sites which indicate particular types of strategies for overthrowing oppression (Wearing, 1986; Williams, 1989; Hooks, 1981).

Analysis of stories, giving women the opportunity to name the moment, has been one way for women to make sense of their lives. Stories have been told through a variety of media, such as the sampler, the patchwork quilt, paintings, songs, music, letters, tales. Stories put a shape on things, they have to go somewhere, and in the process of telling and listening there is a reflective dynamic which can be therapeutic.

A story saves life a little at a time by making us see and hear and taste our lives and dreams more deeply. A story does not rescue life at the end, heroically, but all along the road, continually. I do not make the story; the story makes me.

(Stafford, 1991: 28)

Why should this be so? We argue that it is in the understanding of the person's story, that affirmation and thence wellbeing comes about. This can only happen where there is mutual respect between the storyteller and the listener:

If telling a story means giving oneself away, then we are obligated to devise a method of receiving stories that mediates the space between the self that tells, the self that told, and the self that listens: a method that returns a story to the teller¹ that is both hers and not hers, that contains herself in good company.

(Grumet, 1991: 14)

It was predictable that the partnership of feminism and social work practice would produce a creative setting for the development of modes of intervention that reflect both a new analysis and respond to the changing role of women in the family and workforce. While social

work values are retained in this new frame of reference, there are implications concerning diagnosis and assessment that are at once exciting in their new relevance, but also challenging for those already using a comfortably established style of practice.

... feminist social work has begun to move beyond some of the limitations of both the traditional and the radical social work models of the past. In recent years, feminists have attempted to develop a wider, non-oppressive, anti-discriminatory form of social work theory and practice. This approach questions both the conservative presumption of orthodox casework and the simple class and gender framework advanced by the radical social work movement, and indeed by the early women's movement. The new approach recognises the complexity and diversity of the manifold oppressions that affect the lives of most women and most social work clients.

(Langan, 1992: 1-2)

It is crucial in the process of analysis to identify ways in which women may come together to bring about both personal and social change. This is part of the process of integration.

Integration

Integration is represented by the development of processes that recognise the importance of seeing people holistically. The personal and the political are linked to allow the social as well as the psychological aspect of a client situation to be explored. As Nash (1989: 7) states:

It has to do with seeing the client as a whole person – affected by class, gender, disability. It also relates to the social worker's recognition of the similarities between her own situation as a woman and her client's position.

Integration links an understanding of power relations at the personal level to those at the political level. It demands that the worker has an understanding of the links between theory and practice.

As McNay (1992: 59) argues:

Many social theorists have emphasised the need to see theory and practice as interrelated processes... Social workers need a great deal of 'theory' and knowledge to engage with 'users' in making 'sense' of their situations. However, there is a dilemma here for workers. If their analysis is inaccurate, too narrow or premature, it may be unhelpful or even damaging. If there is no analysis, then users may not get the help they need. Thus workers have to construct the analysis from people's experience... This process of constructing, testing against practice and reconstructing theory has been called praxis. Dialogue and praxis are essential to a non-oppressive mode of working...

Praxis incorporates linking personal troubles and public issues and by focusing this on action we can stand alongside our clients to experience solidarity with them. Analysis and integration link up with affirmation in a logical fashion.

Affirmation

Affirmation is the third of the feminist principles we have identified for practice. Many women lack self-esteem and need considerable help in turning their lives around. Affirmation proceeds from an integrated analysis which enables the worker to demonstrate their recognition within the story being told, of the elements of success, the strength and worthwhileness it will contain. Respect and confidence can thus be conveyed in such a way as will lead naturally to the integration through reframing of the narrative.

A crucial aspect of affirmation is understanding the diversity of women's experiences and the differences they bring to the social work relationship. In preparing this chapter a number of women spoke to us about their journeys into feminist social work. As Beddoe (1993) states:

... take any group of ten women and there'll be issues to do with mental health, addiction, abuse, relationships, violence, all those things that come up - women's self-esteem, our body image - all of those things that we share with all the women in our lives, including our clients. I think that starts us off in

practice from a real base of actually sharing commonalities rather than emphasising differences in status and abilities. But I also think what they say about differences is also important as a feminist, to respect differences. And to highlight differences sometimes, those things that are positive and important, the differences between the lives of heterosexual women and lesbian women, the differences between Maori women and Pacific women, women from other cultures and Pakeha women - to highlight those things for their positive qualities as well as the negative things, the inequalities. I guess I also accept the basic things about empowerment. That is, the idea of helping women to achieve what they want to achieve, setting goals, raising self-esteem, being positive about our lives, taking control, all those things.

Another aspect of affirmation as a principle for practice worth considering, is that put to the World Assembly of Social Workers in Washington and that is 'the transfer of power and authority. I'm talking about getting men, who have had an affirmative action in place for 2,000 years, to understand that what they find difficult in relinquishing, namely power and authority, must be relinquished in order to have a sense of equity in this world' (Lewis, 1992). This is an important co-requisite part of the principle and process of affirmation. Without it the empowerment of women which affirmation should bring about, becomes fraught with danger.

By validating women's lives and acknowledging their achievements social workers can work with women to recognise their own self-worth. This may entail women taking a stand and deciding on how they will support women and walk alongside them in their struggle against oppressive structures. This is instead of pitching women against women, which maintains the oppressive structures that function to control women. This is part of a process of empowerment.

Empowerment

Empowerment is the fourth principle we use in our practice and is the culmination of the previous three. The process of empowerment entails recognition of the rich diversity in women's lives and the many different strategies that women have used to survive. Endur-

ance, resistance, escape, (psychological or physical) retaliation, therapy, self-education, are all possibilities for women. Integrating the stories entails reconstructing the narrative to bring out the meaning of what has been told and make sense of the social and economic structures within which that life has been lived. The storyteller can recognise that her story has much in common with the other women around her and this helps to bring out the political nature of the personal story. Reframing in this way brings the woman face-to-face with her pain, guilt, grief. By looking at it and surviving, she can overcome its effects. She can become stronger than the effect. Giving something a name entails knowledge, and with knowledge comes power. This is an essential ingredient in the action-reflection process:

... this process enables people to make connections between the oppressing and demoralising structures of society and the problems they experience in everyday life; and that by acting on this reality, people develop a new awareness of the possibility of change.

(Freire, 1972: 61)

Analysis accompanied by *integration* leads to *affirmation* which in turn brings about the *empowerment* of the woman or women concerned. This word suffers from overexposure and has even entered the vocabulary of the establishment. The word has become sloganistic. However, we chose to use it here in its feminist meaning. Empowerment here refers to the ability of women who, having come to terms with their lives, go on to demand social justice and change wherever they see the need. This may be in spectacular and public ways or in small domestic situations. The scale is not important. What matters is that women recognise that they can take responsibility for their lives. We have seen this happening many times through our extramural students who suddenly recognise that they can control their own destinies to a far greater extent than they had ever thought possible. The same theme carries through in the stories of women who have developed their feminist analysis which informs their ways of working. Seeing things differently, making choices to step out of line, 'to change the family script: to be the first woman in the family to go to university, to be divorced, to work while

one is looking after one's baby', is one person's story of her journey into feminism (Beddoe, 1993).

Women frequently exist in circumstances where their power to change things for the better is severely limited, partly because change could cause discomfort to the men in their lives, but also because they simply lack the knowledge that would give them access to appropriate resources. Helplessness causes physical and mental health to deteriorate. When someone no longer feels that they can alter or control their life, their self-image may suffer to the point where existing or potential resources are neither recognised nor used.

Empowerment and affirmation are closely linked and interact upon each other. By acknowledging or affirming someone, you can give them the power to take action. By giving someone power, you also confirm them as, in your opinion, being capable and suitable for the task in hand. Of course, there are times when in order to empower someone, or a group of people, you have to take the time to let them work through something more slowly than you think you could do it for them. You may even have to stand back and let them make mistakes or follow a course of action you would avoid. This is all part of empowerment and to have the confidence to adhere to this principle can be a true test of one's commitment to woman-centred practice.

Action and reflection

This principle relates to work with the client but it also relates to the ways in which the worker takes care of herself and develops ways of reflecting on her practice. As Nash (1989: 11) states:

Feminist social workers work for change, and this can make them unpopular or threatening amongst their colleagues. Battered women and violent men, abused children, termination of pregnancy, the restructuring of family units and the range of problems associated with the feminisation of poverty all conspire to produce heavy and stressful areas of intervention. Social workers use supervision as a process in which to give one another support and feedback on their practice with a view to self-improvement and development. Feminist social workers make use of supervision too. The term 'supervision' has connotations of power and inequality, but this does not

vulnerable. Kylie began to realise that what she had thought of as an ordinary family setting had in fact been quite impoverished in that she had missed out on the security that comes with knowing herself to be loved and nurtured by people who put a premium on her happiness as a child. The social worker linked these past experiences to what Kylie was currently facing in her relationship with John.

Kylie began to realise that women do not have to put up with being treated badly by men and that she could make her own decisions. She saw that things can be done differently, and was interested when the social worker suggested that she could join in with a group of young women working on dealing with similar issues for themselves.

Discussion

If we take Kylie's story and use the principles outlined above we see the importance of linking her issues with those of other young women and exposing the common underlying patterns in their lives. Kylie had never had the opportunity to tell her story in such a way that her viewpoint was given recognition and value. Now she had the opportunity to tell it when before, her brother had not shown any interest, or she had been too embarrassed to talk like that with her friends, believing that there was something wrong with her if she could not be happy. She was listened to by a social worker who could understand her story in the wider context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, in which her economic class, her cultural background, her age, gender socialisation and education could all be part of the picture that developed.

Kylie's story, her naming of her world, led to the making of links between her needs and those of other young women like her who were also recognising the gap between their hopes and reality. Kylie had blamed herself for her feelings of unhappiness and isolation. Like many other women:

Any deprivation they feel, as regards to their needs being recognised and met, is explained by what they see as their own 'inadequacies'. They turn inward and on themselves for

have to be part of the process. Some refer to peer-group supervision or consultation when talking about feminist supervision. These terms reflect on equal relationship between those involved and the decision to confront and devise strategies to eliminate the elements of power in the supervisory relationship.

The process of action and reflection takes place both within the client relationship and in social work supervision. It enables the social worker to link theory and practice and to link the individual stories of women to those of other women. We recognise this process in feminist models of supervision, where the social worker remains accountable to the principles of feminist social work practice. All feminist social work practice must incorporate processes for action and reflection. It enables us to continually evaluate our actions in line with our goals and visions.

In this case study we will share a woman's story to show how all the principles can be incorporated into a feminist social work mode of practice.

Kylie's Story¹

Kylie grew up in a household where she regularly went to sleep hearing her Mum and Dad fighting. Her brother James was four years older and didn't seem to get upset about these fights. They were a regular occurrence in the household. Kylie left home at age 17 to attend university. She had always wanted to become a teacher but decided to do a degree first. Kylie met John in her second year of university. After agreeing to go flatting with John she began to feel taken for granted and became unhappy with their relationship.

While at the Family Planning centre getting contraceptive advice, Kylie told the worker that she was feeling uncomfortable about having moved in with John. The worker asked Kylie if she would like to be referred to a woman social worker with experience in working with younger women.

In the process of hearing Kylie's story the worker enabled Kylie to reflect back on times in her life when she felt

Women's Issues in Social Work Practice and Policy Development

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Further reading

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The marginalisation of women in New Zealand has implications for social work practice and presents challenges for service providers. The statistics relating to women illustrate that they are disadvantaged structurally and economically, and are more frequent users of health and welfare services. Research also continues to present alarming statistics with respect to women's exposure to violence. This chapter explores the position of women in the workforce when they are unwaged or in low-paid or part-time work. It considers women as beneficiaries and women as victims of violence. The chapter also focuses on the particular issues confronting rural women, both Māori and non-Māori, and briefly introduces the notion of women-centred practice.

Women and their issues are a significant part of social work. The marginalisation of women is constructed in the notions of what it is to be female. The traditional view of women is that they provide unpaid caring and household services; the traditional view of men is that they gain income from paid work outside the home. The family, at least in Western culture, is represented by the nuclear family. This view has underpinned developments in social policy and, combined with the tendency for women to be represented as passive, dependent, and providing the caring, it means women are in a different position from men in terms of the division of labour, income scale, and the ability to protect themselves from violence. Women's unpaid work is often an extension of mothering and nurturing. Women's unpaid work is concentrated in jobs which are also, to a degree, extensions of mothering and nurturing such as teaching, child care, and work in the social services.

Yet we are told equality is here. Germaine Greer, thirty years after her ground-breaking book *The Female Eunuch*, has stated in her new book,

The Whole Woman (1999), that it is time to get angry again. Greer claims that modern women are exhausted, lonely, guilty, and are mocked by the headline success of a few; that equality for women has failed to materialise despite society's perception that male and female roles are now equal. With two women leading New Zealand politics, Helen Clark as Prime Minister and Jenny Shipley as Leader of the Opposition, it could be argued that New Zealand women are successfully equal with men. So how do women in government stack up against men? According to a report by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA 1998), the *Status of Women in New Zealand*, the country's first Mixed Member Proportional Representation election in 1996 resulted in 21 per cent of the seats in Parliament being held by women, almost a third more than in the previous Parliament. However, even then Māori women held only 5 per cent, up from 2 per cent in the previous Parliament. Women in local government are a slightly higher proportion, making up 28 per cent of elected representatives and 17.4 per cent of those elected as mayor. Women who identify as Māori comprise 13 per cent of local government representatives, which is a significantly higher figure than that of Māori women in central government.

Social workers cannot ignore the marginalisation of women. Women's position in society is of crucial importance to us, as this group has a higher risk than men of becoming social work clients. Gender analysis is important to understanding the position of women who, because of their reproductive and family- and community-managing roles, are involved in different activities from men. Women tend to combine the roles of family and domestic worker, community volunteer, and paid worker. In the rural sector, farmwomen are increasingly assuming extra roles as they take up off-farm employment as well as working on the farm.

INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS FOR WOMEN

According to the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings, the official population of New Zealand at that time was 3 618 302, of which 50.9 per cent were women. Of the total population, 14.5 per cent identified as Māori, of which 50.7 per cent were women (Statistics New Zealand 1997b). Since 1984, governments in New Zealand have taken a market-oriented approach to managing the economy. Some key concepts of this strategy are a deregulated economy, the sale of state assets, a New Right ideology (with an emphasis on individual rather than collective responsibility), reduced government expenditure, the removal of tariffs and other protections of local industry, and the 'targeting' of state benefits. The basis of the ideology is the belief

that access to paid work will ensure the well-being of society and that there is a need to move 'from welfare to well-being'—which we should, perhaps, read as 'from welfare to workfare'. (See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of this ideology and its implications for social work.)

However, market forces do not ensure a fair distribution of well-being, as women and men do not compete on equal terms in the marketplace. The assumption of the sexual division of labour is that women do most of the unpaid caring work. The women who contribute as full-time caregivers at home (i.e., in a third of all two-parent families and two-thirds of families with children under five [Statistics New Zealand 1998d]) are rendered invisible. Their unpaid work is crucial to the economy and its value is largely ignored. Marilyn Waring, in her book *Counting for Nothing* (1988), has identified the invisibility of women's labour when the wealth of a nation is determined. Unless they are being paid, they are regarded as non-producers. When the wealth of a nation is calculated, a vast amount of work—most of it performed by women—is left out of the equation. The contribution to household work, to caring for elderly and young dependants, and all the unpaid work that is traditionally undertaken by women remains unacknowledged and invisible. (See also Rivers et al. 1997.)

When New Zealand women are in paid employment, there is still the matter of the income gap between the sexes. The waged median income for men at the 1996 Census was \$22 000, compared to \$12 666 for women. For Māori men it was \$16 000, compared to \$11 200 for Māori women (Statistics New Zealand 1998c). It can be seen that the medians for Māori and non-Māori women are more closely aligned than those of the men. When considering only those in full-time employment, at August 1997 the average weekly wage for women was 76.8 per cent of men's average weekly earnings. Women's hourly earnings were 81.2 per cent of men's, and the *Status of Women in New Zealand* predicts that the gender pay gap is unlikely to narrow over the next five years (MWA 1998).

Women are increasingly part of the paid workforce. Greater numbers are leaving the workforce only briefly for child-bearing and are also choosing to do this later in their lives (MWA 1998). In 1999 the government wished to extend the provisions of parental leave and offer twelve weeks' paid leave to both partners of a working couple. However, for families with full-time caregivers at home, it proposed to offer paid parental leave of two weeks to the 'working parent'. The message to those who contribute full-time at home is that they are less deserving of support.

With economic changes leading to a decrease in availability of full-time work and an increase in part-time work, women have been the winners. There has been a 59 per cent growth in the area of work of less than thirty

hours per week, and the 1996 Census found that 70.5 per cent of those working part-time were women. Men showed the biggest increase in part-time employment work, up by 83.7 per cent since 1991, but this reflects the loss of full-time employment by many (Statistics New Zealand 1998c).

There is no way of knowing how many women take up part-time employment as a response to their partner's loss of a full-time wage or their complete loss of a male's earning capacity (e.g. through separation and divorce). Women's ability to earn is taking on crucial importance in order to protect household incomes. However, women in the workforce continue to be concentrated in a narrow range of female occupations, and usually lower paid than men. The workforce role, when combined with the responsibility for unpaid caring work in the home and the need for quality child care, adds extra pressure to women's lives. The difficulties are even greater for unmarried women with children.

Women and unpaid work outside the home

Women are more likely than men to be involved in unpaid work outside the household, and they do more hours of this type of work than men do. The 1996 Census found that 45.7 per cent of New Zealanders aged 15 years and over had participated in some form of unpaid work outside the household in the previous four weeks, with women making up 55.8 per cent of this group (Statistics New Zealand 1998f). Māori had the highest participation rate, followed in descending order by Pākehā, Pacific Island, and Asian groups. Māori also spent longer hours in unpaid work outside the home (Statistics New Zealand 1997a). The *Status of Women in New Zealand* report (MWA 1998) notes that many women in part-time employment also engage in unpaid work outside the home—about 62 per cent in fact, compared with 47 per cent of men in part-time work.

The overall picture of New Zealand women that these statistics provide is that many in the paid workforce are stretching themselves to full capacity, carrying out paid work, unpaid work at home, and unpaid work outside the home in their communities and extended families. Indeed, the trend away from institutional care and towards supporting people in the community relies upon the availability of people in the community to do this work. Almost inevitably, it is women who provide the unpaid caring. The Ministry of Women's Affairs (1998, p. 54) find that 'Women provide health promotion and primary care services and play a crucial role in child health, care of older people and care of people with disabilities and mental health disorders'.

In summary, women dominate in the part-time workforce, in unpaid work outside the home, and in unpaid work within the home, and still rely on a male wage-earner (or the state) for their major financial support.

WOMEN AND STATE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The following shows the allocation of the total paid out by the state in the provision of income maintenance in 1998 (Department of Social Welfare 1998a):

- 50.7 per cent NZ Superannuation
- 15.1 per cent Domestic Purposes Benefit
- 13.3 per cent Unemployment Benefit
- 9.3 per cent Sickness and Invalids Benefits
- 11.6 per cent Other

Women make up 56 per cent of those receiving New Zealand Superannuation and 55 per cent of the other benefits. Overall, women make up 70 per cent of parents receiving some form of benefit assistance, including accommodation supplements which assist people with limited income and assets to pay accommodation costs above a predetermined level (Else 1996).

The payment of Superannuation has been positive for women. For many, it means that for the first time in their lives they have their own income. At present the payment is gender-neutral as it is provided at the same level to both women and men and does not make the assumption that monies received are shared (Else 1997). However, the right of women to state-funded income maintenance on retirement is threatened by the ideology supporting compulsory private savings from income (including state benefit income) rather than a state-funded system. It is estimated that at least 85 per cent of women and 40 per cent of men would not be able to save enough for a minimum retirement fund at the most basic level (Else 1996). Problems of access to the labour market and earnings, as well as time out of the labour market, would ensure ongoing inequality for women on retirement from the paid workforce.

Governments are seeking ways to control welfare spending. The Director General of Social Welfare stated in her department's *Annual Report* (Department of Social Welfare 1997a, p. 4) that 'Management and staff throughout the organisation are under no illusions ... that the challenges we face to help reverse increasing numbers dependent on welfare is immense'. In 1998, Income Support and the New Zealand Employment Services combined to form WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand) in accordance with the ideology of 'welfare to well-being' (or 'welfare to workfare', as some commentators have ventured to call it). The unemployment and sickness benefits were renamed 'the community wage', and all women who receive a benefit and whose youngest child is over fourteen years of age are expected to make themselves available for paid employment.

In 1998, women made up 91 per cent of the recipients of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB). The income maintenance this provides has always

been the subject of attention and debate. It was set up in 1973 for sole-parent families that did not have a breadwinner's wage to depend on while the parent (mostly women) provided full-time unpaid care for children (Else 1996). At the last Census, of all New Zealand families with children, 28.3 per cent were sole parent families. Only 11.9 per cent of these families were provided for by men; therefore the needs of children in these families were maintained mainly by women and/or the state (Statistics New Zealand 1998d). Any threat to the DPB is, therefore, a threat to the women who head sole-parent families. If earning, these women are in lower paid and part-time jobs and, when relying on benefit payments, they are dependent on what the state allocates them. Sole parenting is therefore generally associated with low incomes, and female-headed Māori households are even more dependent on welfare income than non-Māori because they are statistically earning less money than women who head non-Māori families.

If well-being depends on access to the marketplace for a job, how well does the New Zealand job market at the end of the twentieth century provide opportunities for paid work? To qualify as unemployed in the 1996 census, a respondent had to state that he or she was available for work and had actively sought work in the previous four weeks. The census found that 7.7 per cent of the workforce was unemployed. For Pākehā, the rate was 5.4 per cent, compared to 17.5 per cent for Māori. However, the figures do not include women who would like to work but for various reasons are unable to, or the women who would prefer to increase their part-time hours. In summary, the ability of the New Zealand marketplace to provide work and income maintenance for women is limited, and women not in full-time, adequately-paid employment either rely on a male wage-earner or on the state for income maintenance.

WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

The term 'violence' encompasses family violence, rape, sexual abuse, physical violence, and psychological harm. (For a detailed discussion of family violence, see Chapter 25.) For protection from violence women look to men, and yet men are the main source of violence. According to a study first published in 1996, the *Women's Safety Survey* (cited in MWA 1998), 21 per cent of men had physically abused their female partner in the previous year and 35 per cent had physically abused their partner at some time in their life together. Of Māori women with current partners, a quarter had experienced at least one act of physical or sexual abuse in the past year. Māori women were also more likely to receive medical or hospital treatment resulting from abuse. The annual cost to New Zealand for family violence is

estimated at over a billion dollars a year. Police statistics show that in the five years to 1998, 40 per cent of all homicides resulted from domestic disputes and 4 per cent from child abuse (Southey et al. 1994).

All violence, including sexual violence, is of major concern because it has an extremely significant impact on individuals and the community—not only the immediate harm of the offence, but also the physical and psychological scars that can be enduring. Many victims of sexual violence are children, and many of the offences against them are committed by people known to them. These offenders have usually committed a number of offences, violent and otherwise. In recent years, there has been an increase in the total number of convictions for sexual violation—from 161 in 1986, to 553 in 1992, and 591 in 1997. In 33 per cent of all convictions in 1992 and 38 per cent of convictions in 1997, the victim was under twelve years of age; these cases resulted in slightly longer sentences. The average length of custodial sentence for rape in 1992 was five years and nine months, and in 1997 this had increased to 7 years 5 months (Southey et al. 1994; Spier 1997). There is no reliable estimate of unreported sexual offending in New Zealand.

Changing attitudes towards family violence

Major changes in support of women came about with the Domestic Violence Act 1995. The key changes in the Act were to replace non-violence orders and non-molestation orders with a single 'protection order'. It widened the meaning of violence to embrace psychological abuse (including threats, intimidation, and witnessing violence). Any member of a household may apply for protection orders. Under the legislation, access to protection is now financially easier, with legal aid for applicants, and no requirement to make any financial contribution. There are new guidelines of arrest for the police, and they have the power of automatic revocation of firearms licences. The Courts have stronger powers through increased penalties for breaches of protection orders and can direct offenders to treatment programmes. New privacy rules allow recipients of protection orders to apply to have their name removed from specific public lists. However, it will take time before it is clear if the Domestic Violence Act 1995 reduces the number of victims of violence.

It has been recognised that through education the incidence of domestic violence can be reduced, so attendance at non-violence programmes has been given increasing emphasis. Of particular significance for Māori is that programmes for Māori clients must include *tikanga Māori* (Māori values and concepts), including *mana wahine* (the prestige attributed to women), *tiamaniki* (the importance of the safeguarding and rearing of children), and *whanaungatanga* (family relationships and their importance). It is also required

that Māori representatives are on the panels to approve programmes and programme providers (MWA 1998).

Other changes seen in recent years include those made by the Guardianship Amendment Act 1995. Where allegations of violence have been made against a person pursuing access to children, the Court must decide whether there was violence and, if so, then an order for unsupervised access cannot be made unless the Court is satisfied that the child will be safe.

The Women's Refuge movement, which began when the first Women's Refuge was opened in Christchurch in 1974, and the Rape Crisis movement have both been and still are crucial to the changing attitudes towards violence in New Zealand. These are examples of women-centred practice and, at the time of their inception, were seen as fringe organisations. Their work was an extension of radical feminist commitment. The groups were voluntary and acting outside of the existing structures and commenced their work without concern for having the financial support of the government. They chose to organise as collectives (a political decision designed to challenge the power of the patriarchy), and these collectives were based on the principles of responsibility, task-sharing, and direct access and participation in decision-making processes. While primarily involved in service delivery to women who are the victims of male violence, the organisations also saw themselves as political entities involved in a campaign to challenge the values and structures of New Zealand society.

The groups have now moved in from the fringe and are, to a major extent, dependent on government grants. They now must concern themselves with issues regarding the provision of services, management structures, financial accounts, and staffing. However, it is hoped that the groups will continue to be a catalyst for changing government policy towards violence, as well as changing society's attitudes.

Critical questions

- 1 Women are living under more and more pressure between the marketplace, the family, and unpaid work, especially rural women. How can social work as a profession work toward the alleviation of this pressure?
- 2 Women are overrepresented in the lower income bracket and in terms of receiving income maintenance. How can social workers respond to the feminisation of poverty?
- 3 How can social work better respond to the needs of women who are exposed to family violence?

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE RURAL ECONOMY

Rural areas make up 93 per cent of New Zealand's land mass. Fifteen per cent of New Zealand's total population (52.03 per cent of whom are male and 47.96 per cent female [Statistics New Zealand 1998f]) and 18 per cent of the Māori population (51.13 per cent of whom are male and 48.85 per cent female, [Statistics New Zealand 1997a]) live in areas defined as rural. The rural sector consists of rural centres with populations of 300 to 1000 people, and what is termed 'countryside'. Fourteen per cent of women in New Zealand are rural, the vast majority of whom (84 per cent) live in countryside areas. Rural women are 15 per cent Māori and 85 per cent non-Māori. (For further details, see Rivers et al. 1997; MWA 1998.) While some rural areas have seen a population decline, other areas have seen an increase in numbers, so overall the rural population has remained stable over the last two decades. The rural population close to urban areas, tourism, and the retirement and leisure-based industries have all seen growth, and this has compensated for the losses in areas reliant on pastoral agriculture or forestry employment (Statistics New Zealand 1997b). The rural sector, therefore, has seen a shift in emphasis in terms of its population distribution.

While men outnumber women in the rural sector, the difference is declining as women are becoming economically self-sufficient, and more single women (including widows) now live in rural areas. Within the context of the market-driven economy, rural New Zealand has been subjected to rapid change in recent decades. It has seen the removal of farm subsidies, on-farm job losses, and job losses within rural centres, such as with the closure of meat-processing works. *Status of Women in New Zealand* (MWA 1998) points out that in the 1996 Census, 23 per cent of the female rural workforce was classified as self-employed or employer, compared to 10 per cent of their urban counterparts. Farm women have become the economic unit integral to keeping many family farms financially viable. In Ponter's (1996) study of 1600 rural women, 30 per cent of women involved in off-farm paid employment said their income was essential to cover the operating costs of their farms, and 12 per cent said their income was essential for farm development. Farm women now operate in a number of roles and a multiplicity of tasks—domestic work, unpaid caring responsibilities, community involvement, farm work (both physical and management), and also running their own business, or taking off-farm employment that might require commuting to urban centres. They combine all this with their gender role of being responsible for the psychological support and well-being of their family. Women have taken on different jobs with the changing nature of rural communities and diversified activities on and off the farm. Rural living is now generally recognised as including a varied range of activities rather than just farming.

Māori women's contribution to the rural New Zealand economy is interesting—they are increasing their rate of participation in business at a faster rate than any other group (Rivers et al. 1997). Māori women are less likely to be part of the farming economy. They are predominantly wage and salary earners and this increases their risk of unemployment to double that for non-Māori. However, while the unemployment rate for rural women is low, this can depend on location.

Women and the survival of rural communities

While women have been key to rural diversification, their participation in decision-making is only slowly increasing. Women are more likely to be elected as councillors or mayors of city councils than of district or regional councils. They have almost equal representation on school boards of trustees as men do, but their representation on farming industry producer boards is very low (Rivers et al. 1997; MWA 1998). Yet women's role in the rural economy is vital for holding the family and community together. Rural women undertake a higher level of unpaid voluntary activities than do women living in urban areas (Statistics New Zealand 1998f). These activities include welfare and support work, domestic services, and education services. Rural Māori women include the same range of activities, but are more likely to be involved in whānau activities, and in arts and cultural activities (Rivers et al. 1997).

Rural communities have undergone economic and social restructuring and will continue to do so, including the continuing rationalisation of various services. Traditional banks have been replaced by tele-banking and EFTPOS; call centres are replacing WINZ and other government department offices; petrol services are being lost, and there is a lack of public transport. Child care facilities are often unavailable, and communities face increasing difficulties in retaining health services and attracting and keeping health professionals.

Housing, that basic necessity to a person's well-being, is a variable rural resource. The ideology that the market will provide housing is nonsense in a number of rural parts of New Zealand, and the provision of adequate low-cost housing is a major concern. Else (1996, p. 219) reports that in Northland, Waikato, and the Bay of Plenty, 'There are Māori families with children living in atrocious housing conditions—tents, caravans, makeshift sheds. There is no rental housing available; they cannot afford to buy; and they can't afford to build'. Rural areas of Northland and the East Cape are the most affected; Housing New Zealand has set up a low deposit scheme in these areas. However, Else (1996) notes that only 180 of the 2041 families who have been through the pre-programme subsequently built or purchased a house. Income has to be adequate to pay the mortgage and the rates. Housing shortages also inevitably lead to higher rents in the free market.

So why have rural communities not disappeared? It would appear that women's increasingly diversified role has been a key factor in keeping such communities going, including their participation in both paid and unpaid work. The connection to the land is also significant. The Māori understanding is well documented in the Treaty of Waitangi. The *whenua*—the land—is very important to the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of Māori people. For non-Māori farming women and their families there is also a strong connection to the land, a sense of being and belonging. Land gives farming people their identity and it appears that women are prepared to take off-farm work in order for the farm to survive and be retained by the family.

Rural women have organised themselves politically. The organisation *Women in Agriculture* was set up under the influence of the Women's Movement and its brief was to change attitudes towards women farming, i.e. women, including single women, being farmers in their own right rather than 'farmers' wives'. Women have used their networks in various non-government organisations, of which the best known is the Women's Division of Federated Farmers. This has also been a significant lobby group on other issues that concern rural women and their families (Rivers et al. 1997).

Women have also taken advantage of government initiatives such as the Rural Education Activities Programme (REAP). This is an educational resource that provides formal and informal learning opportunities for the whole community from early childhood education to adult education. Each area has developed the resource in different ways. For example, Marlborough REAP has worked to combat domestic violence, while Southland REAP has organised a variety of activities including self-defence courses, rural women's 'stepping-out days', and health seminars (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 1997; MWA 1998).

Key practice issues

- 1 Women are not homogeneous, and unique responses are needed to address the unique experiences of women seeking social work services.
- 2 Within the current economic environment and the reduction of services generally, the needs of rural women are particularly at risk.
- 3 The feminisation of poverty is a social issue that social work as a profession has a responsibility to publicly address.

In addition, women have been involved in rural job-creation initiatives, supported by the Community Employment Group of the Department of Labour, which has provided knowledge and then worked with communities to develop projects and supply small one-off grants to kickstart projects.

Once again, rural women have stepped outside of traditional roles and taken responsibility for the revitalisation of their communities.

WOMEN'S POSITION AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Feminist demands from some organisations mentioned here such as Women's Refuge, Rape Crisis, and Women in Agriculture were not instigated by the social work profession. These organisations and their demands emerged because women took up the issues facing their lives and brought them into the public arena—issues such as violence and the devaluing and marginalisation of women, which have been traditionally seen as private issues. They drew public attention to the fact that women are undervalued, unappreciated, and poorly served by societal structures. Taking heed of women's collective demands and moving their concerns into the public domain has led to many positive developments such as the Domestic Purposes Benefit, changes to the way violence against women is viewed and dealt with, and the setting up of women-specific and Māori women's organisations. There has also been a challenge to social work educators to include women's issues in their training courses (Nash & Munford 1994), and the challenge to social workers to recognise that women are marginalised, simply by virtue of their gender. This marginalisation ensures that women are the main users of social work services.

An understanding of women's position in society is vital in the development of a social work practice framework that does not pathologise women. Our practice must be informed by women's position in society and also the position of their race, as regards Māori women. To be women-centred is to be feminist, and within this framework five social work practice principles have come to be accepted. These are analysis, integration, affirmation, empowerment, and supervision/support (Nash 1989). In *Social Work in Action*, Nash and Munford (1994, p. 243) review these and suggest the principles of support and supervision be changed to 'action and reflection': '[t]his principle relates to work with the client, ... the ways in which the worker takes care of herself and develops ways of reflecting on her practice'.

Women and their issues are a significant part of social work. The multiple roles through which women contribute to our society are also the roles that may trap women in a gendered labour market economy and contribute to women being high users of social services and social work services. This alone reinforces the need for social workers to be vigilant to issues of sexism and gender discrimination in social work practice and in the development of social policy. Women-centred practice is explored more fully in Chapter 24.

Further reading

- Boyd, J. 1993, *Daughters of the Land. Nga Uri Wāhine A Hīncahuone*, The Bath-House Art & History Museum, Rotorua.
- Elise, A. 1996, *False Economy: New Zealanders Face the Conflict between Paid and Unpaid Work*, Tandem Press, Wellington.
- Moir, M. 1997, *New Zealand Country Women*, Tandem Press, North Shore City. (This book contains photographs and interviews of a diverse range of women who live and work in rural New Zealand.)

