

## Chapter Twelve

### NO JOB, NO WIFE? - FATHERS, PAID WORK AND CHANGES IN LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN NEW ZEALAND

by  
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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Lilla (1998), in *A Tale of Two Reactions*, outlines a polarisation in concern about changes in work and family life in the United States. He argues that the political left is generally concerned about the excesses of capitalism, such as the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the loss of jobs for low skilled people and the growth of low paid, and insecure work. However, he suggests the left is generally supportive of the moral, family and social changes that have occurred since the 1960s. In contrast, Lilla claims that the political right is uncritical of capitalism but is concerned with what they see as an increasing moral permissiveness. This permissiveness is indicated by trends such as the increased divorce rate and a growth in sole parenting. Lilla suggests that the left needs to take a more critical approach to changes in family types, with not all the new flexibility leading to positive outcomes for children, while the political right need to accept that not all the new flexibility in labour markets is good for families and society. Overall, a theme running through his article is that instability in jobs might be associated with instability in relationships.

There are, of course, many forces influencing the formation, structure, and function of families and households. These include economic factors as well as those that relate to changing attitudes of individuals and norms in a society. Changing labour demand is an external factor which is generally outside the control of individuals. Moreover, in small countries such as New Zealand it is increasingly outside the control of governments. However, while individuals are strongly influenced by societal norms, they continue to have a considerable level of control over their own attitudes. Many of the external and internal factors influencing the ability of men to “father” in an involved and positive way were discussed in the first volume of *Perspectives on Fathering*. In this current paper, I explore in greater depth theories that suggest links between changing patterns of paid work for men and changing family and childrearing patterns.<sup>1</sup> These links can work both ways. Changes in paid (and unpaid work) may influence family/household patterns, while changes in family/household patterns may influence patterns of work.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I mainly focus on men in the 25-44 age group. These are the years that a significant proportion of men make their initial decisions (intentionally or accidentally) about having children.

## 2. CHANGES IN PATTERNS OF PAID WORK FOR MEN

As shown in my previous paper, the period 1986 to 1996 was very significant time of overall job loss for men in the main childraising age groups (Callister, 1999a). As also discussed in my earlier paper, along with the decline in participation in paid work, in all these age groups there was also strong growth, although from a low base, in the proportion of men working part time. In addition, overseas literature suggests that, even for many of those men who do have full-time jobs, the actual or perceived long-term security of this work has reduced since the 1970s (Callister, 1997).<sup>2</sup>

There is also a spatial dimension to the changes in work. There are some pockets in New Zealand where a very high proportion of men are not in paid work (Callister, 1998a). For example, in 1996 14 percent of geographic areas (as measured by area units) had 30 percent or more of men aged 25-59 not in paid work, while in 6 percent of area units 40 percent or more of this target population were not in paid work.

Changes in income, often linked to changes in work patterns, can also impact on decisions by men to form couples and start families. Statistics New Zealand (1999) shows a decline in real market income for men aged 25-44 in the period 1982 to 1996. Australian research also shows that, on average, real full-time weekly earnings between 1986 and 1996 declined for men in the 15-24 age groups but, apparently in contrast to New Zealand, increased in the 35-44 age group (Gregory, 1999). Gregory notes that the accumulated loss of income of young males over their initial years of adulthood has been very large and this has significantly reduced their ability to finance household formation and to support children.

Despite these changes, many men see being in paid work as a critical factor in their wellbeing. For example, recent British research amongst young, and relatively unskilled, men suggests that most still see being in paid work as a key part of defining their masculinity (Lloyd, 1999). Of direct relevance to the promotion of positive, involved fathering, other British research, based on interviews with fathers who had teenage children, indicates that most of these particular men could not see how they could be a good father without being a good economic provider (Warin *et al*, 1999).<sup>3</sup>

## 3. WHY HAVE A GROUP OF MEN LEFT THE PAID WORKFORCE?

There have been many theories put forward as to why a significant number of men have exited paid work (Callister, 1999b; Dixon, 1996). These include:

- increases in the enrolment rates of people aged 25 and over in full-time tertiary education and training. This may be partly in reaction to a tightening labour market
- a reduction in the demand for low skilled labour
- a loss of full-time jobs and an increase in part-time work

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<sup>2</sup> There is always a need for caution when analysing changes over a relatively short period of time. New trends may be simply a repetition of behaviour seen in earlier times. In addition, there is a danger in comparing changes that have occurred in New Zealand since the 1970s, as this period was unusual in many ways (Callister, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> This traditional view was not only expressed by fathers but also by many of the children.

- an increase in inequality of earnings amongst men, with many men not able, or wanting, to take the low wage jobs
- an increase in female dominated occupations
- increases in the level or availability of non-wage sources of income, such as the income of other family members or government income maintenance transfers.
- increases in the level or availability of income from non-market or black market economic activities.

However, there is another reason overlooked by most labour market analysts as to why a group of men have dropped out of paid work. Some men in two-parent families have voluntarily decided to stay home full-time, either short term or for long periods, in order to look after children (e.g. Grbich, 1992). In addition, some of the partnered men who have involuntarily left paid work may be spending some of the additional time they have looking after children. There has also been some growth in sole father families between 1986 and 1996 (Davey, 1998). While in New Zealand sole fathers are more likely to be in paid work than sole-mothers, they are still far less likely to be employed than partnered fathers.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. ARE MORE MEN WHO ARE NOT IN PAID WORK LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN IN NEW ZEALAND?**

Research by Pleck (1997) indicates that in 1960 married American fathers spent, on average, one hour looking after their children for every four hours spent by their wives. In the mid 1990s, the ratio is one hour for every 1.5 hours their wives spend with their children. A significant part of this change reflects a decline in the amount of time mothers are spending on childcare. However, such averages disguise some major shifts occurring within particular families, and a lack of change in others.

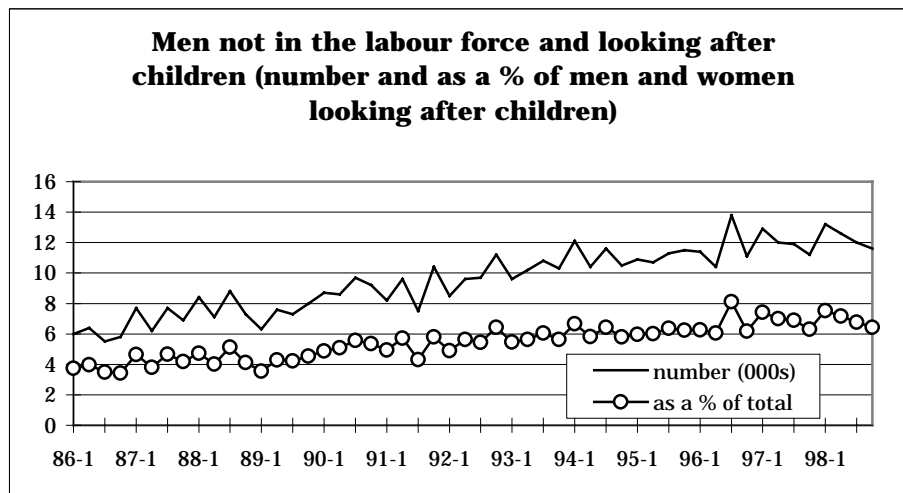
While Statistics New Zealand's time use survey will provide some useful information on the amount of childcare undertaken by fathers, there is currently little reliable data on the number of men looking after children at home in New Zealand or the time spent in this activity. However, the Household Labour Force Survey does provide an estimate of the number of men not in the labour force and looking after children as a main activity (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This suggests that any rise in the proportion of fathers gaining custody may well be associated with a further small decline in male participation in paid work.

<sup>5</sup> This is an estimate from a very small sample and should be treated with caution.

Figure 1



Source: Statistics New Zealand, Household Labour Force Survey

The HLFS data indicates a steady increase, from a low base, in the number of men looking after children between 1986 and 1998. This rise continued over a period of both overall employment loss and a period of employment gain. When the numbers of men undertaking childcare is divided by the total number of men and women undertaking childcare, there was also a rise in this proportion over the period shown. However, it is not known whether these men are in sole father families or two parent families, or the age of the children. In addition, these data do not indicate the number of men classified as unemployed and actively looking for paid work. These men may spend more time looking after children. For example, in the U.S. Brines (1994) found that when compared to husbands working full-time, newly unemployed husbands contributed more time to household work, although adding complexity to this relationship the long term unemployed contributed less.

The HLFS data indicate that despite the very strong growth in non-employment of prime-aged men relatively few of these men appear to have left the labour force to become full-time caregivers. There are a number of possible reasons why this could be so:

1. a high proportion of men who are not in paid work may not be fathers
2. many fathers who are not in paid work are not living with their children
3. that fathers in two parent families who are out of work may tend to be with partners who are also out of work and so gender roles in the home are not challenged
4. that many of the fathers who we are now seeing in New Zealand spending more time with their children are unemployed and actively looking for work, working part-time or are shiftworkers
5. that generally men who lack skills to be in the paid workforce also lack the skills to look after children

Given the lack of New Zealand data, it is difficult to explore points one, four and five. However, the next sections use New Zealand data to examine points two and three.

## 5. CHANGING LABOUR AND MARRIAGE MARKETS AND THE GROWTH OF “FATHERLESS” HOUSEHOLDS

As discussed in volume one of *Perspectives on Fathering* there have been many theories put forward to explain the growth in sole-mother families. These include attitudes of the Family Court in determining custody, changes in welfare entitlements and changes in the labour market.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the literature on the growth in the number of sole-father families in most industrialised countries is less developed (Davey, 1999). Underlying some of the theories about the growth of sole-mother families is the acceptance, by either individuals or institutions, of the idea of relatively unmovable roles for men and women in terms of responsibility for income earning and childrearing.

Key issues in the employment theories are:

- a lack of job opportunities or earning potential for a group of men.
- a lack of job opportunities or earning potential for a group of women.
- increased educational and earning opportunities for another group of women.<sup>7</sup>

and connected with the last point:

- increased “marketisation” of household work, including childcare, which facilitates living in single adult childrearing households.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper, I focus on the possible impact of a loss of jobs and income amongst a group of men.<sup>9</sup> Theories about the impact on families of the loss of jobs by men, and particularly black men in the United States, have been popularised by Wilson.<sup>10</sup> His hypothesis focuses not just on the loss of jobs, but on an overall loss of earning power by many men. Wilson has argued that black women, especially young black women, have been facing a shrinking pool of “marriageable” men. A decline in the

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<sup>6</sup> Various aspects of labour market change have the potential to influence the number of “fatherless” families. For example, if health and safety requirements are not adequately monitored or enforced, then fatal accidents, usually in industries in which men are highly over-represented, may increase.

<sup>7</sup> This gives these women more choice to either live alone or in same-sex couples and raise children. New reproductive technology can also assist this trend. However, increased educational and earning opportunities for women are also associated with lower fertility rates, including some women choosing not to have children.

<sup>8</sup> High incomes and the “marketisation” of household work also assists a small group of men to live alone whether in a childrearing or non-childrearing situation.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the possible impact of a lack of job opportunities for women on childrearing issues, see Olsen and Farkas (1990).

<sup>10</sup> The idea that men with low levels of financial resources will delay marriage or perhaps not marry is not new. For instance, Herlihy (1997) shows that in the middle ages in Europe men normally had to wait until they received a paternal inheritance or had earned sufficient resources themselves before they could marry.

“marriageability” of men who have poor labour market prospects may lead to a significant proportion of them living alone or in some other form of non-family arrangement. The non-family arrangements include boarding house type living or prison. However, many of these men may still be involved, or have been involved, in casual, and sometimes long term, relationships with people outside their households. These relationships may result in them having children whom they do not live with and may not support financially. These children are then generally raised in sole mother families, many of whom are supported by the state.

There are United States and Australian studies which lend some support to the Wilson hypothesis (e.g. Birrell and Rapson, 1998; Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Lichter *et al*, 1992). For example, Birrell and Rapson show that, in 1996, for Australian men aged 25-44, those with higher incomes, as well as those in higher status occupations (such as managers and professionals), were more likely to be in couples. This research also found that those men on lower incomes were also more likely to be separated or divorced. Overall, men in paid work were far more likely to be in a couple than men without a paid job. In addition, as Rankin (1999) has shown in New Zealand, in some situations under the current tax and welfare system women and children in couples where the male has a low income are better off financially if he leaves the family.

Nevertheless, there are challenges to the Wilson view. For example, in the U.S. Wood (1995) suggest that the decline in the number of well earning, young black men explains only three to four percent of the decline in black marriage rates in the 1970s. In New Zealand, Goodger (1998) also shows that the growth in sole parenthood began ahead of the growth in male unemployment. The growth in sole parenthood started in the early 1970s, while the rapid increase in male unemployment occurred firstly in the late 1970s / early 1980s, with a further increase in the late 1980s. Goodger also shows that in New Zealand most sole-parenthood is the result of couples separating rather than not forming. In addition, other studies suggest linkages between low male earnings and the separation rates of existing relationships are complex. For example, Ono (1998) using U.S. longitudinal data suggests that when a wife has no earnings, low husband earnings lead to a higher rate of separation. But when a wife has earnings and there was low earnings by the husband there was no impact on separation rates

The varied literature on the cause of “fatherless” sole-mother families suggests that it is likely that multiple theories are needed to explain this growth in most industrialised countries. For example, the reasons for a poorly educated teenage urban black women in the United States, in the 1970s, having had a child but not forming a couple are likely to differ substantially from the reasons why a mid-30s, well-educated Pakeha women in New Zealand in the 1990s might become a sole parent.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there are some interesting associations between changing work patterns of men and childrearing arrangements in New Zealand in the period 1986 to 1996.

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<sup>11</sup> Given the wide variation in reasons for entering a “fatherless” family, it should not be surprising that the outcomes for children living in them will also show considerable variation.

## Fewer men in legal marriages

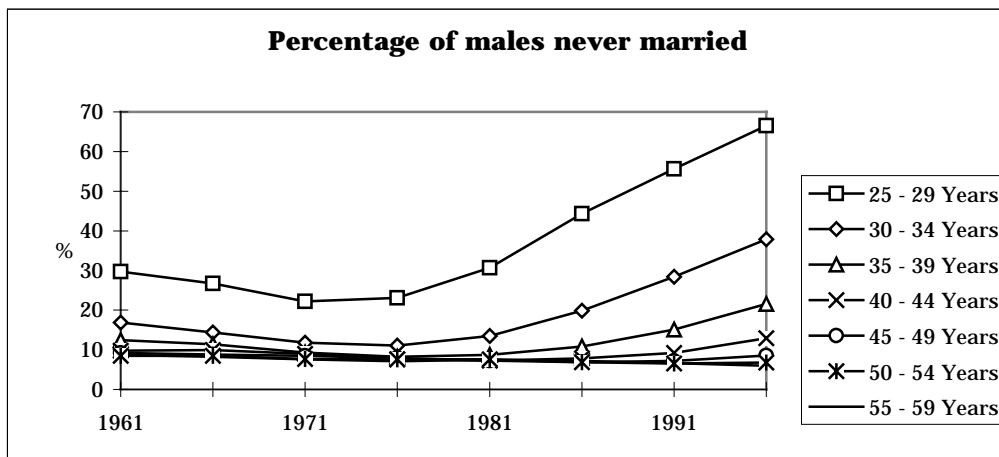
*The problem that arises with fatherhood is that while mothers are easily discernable, paternity is more tenuous. Societies have therefore been faced with the problem of tying men to mothers and children. Traditionally this has been achieved through marriage and the assumption of paternity within it, whereby a child was deemed to be the offspring of its mother's husband.*

Sarre (1996: 1)

Marriage rates have historically declined in New Zealand in times of economic hardship, but the latest decline began in the mid 1970s and has been a long term trend. Figure 2 shows that the increase in the proportion of men who have never married has been led by the younger end of the age groups. In fact, for men aged 50 or more there had been a reduction in the proportion never married in much of the period shown. Even for the 40-44 age groups there was a decline in the proportion of men never married through to 1986.

In the early years of this trend, some of the rise in the rate of younger people not marrying will have been due to people delaying marriage. But as time has past, many of those who may have been simply delaying marriage have never married. While the rise in the proportion of both men and women not marrying could be seen to be associated with a declining level of male employment there were other predictors of marriage decline in action over this period, such as an increasing female participation in tertiary education. The decline in formal marriage rates is probably more due to changing social norms than to changes in the economy.

Figure 2



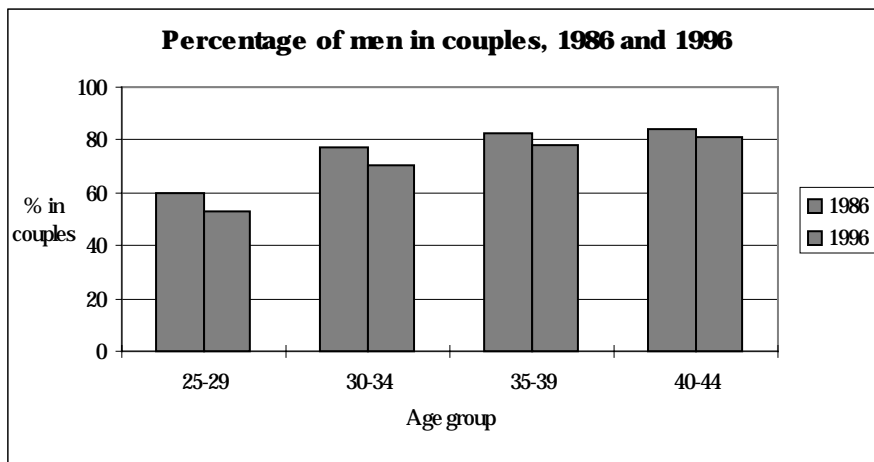
Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

### Fewer men in couples

Figure 3 narrows the focus onto men in the 25-44 age group, but widens the definition of couples to include defacto couples.<sup>12</sup> Again, part of the change is a delay in forming couples.

Other census data indicate that, in line with Australian patterns, in 1996 those men not in paid work were far less likely than employed men to be in a couple with or without children and, connected with this, men with no formal qualifications were also slightly less likely to be in a couple (Callister, 1999c).<sup>13</sup>

Figure 3



Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

Figure 4 shows that, in 1996, in these age groups there were not only fewer couples, but a smaller proportion of the couples that had formed were childrearing couples.<sup>14</sup> Again, part of the reason behind this trend is a delay in having children.<sup>15</sup> However, it is not the full explanation.

<sup>12</sup> In the 1996 data, same-sex couples are included. It is possible some same-sex couples are also counted in the 1986 data. These data are for people who say they are in a couple relationship but may not necessarily cohabit with that person. I then switch to using derived household data in the remaining charts and tables. There are some minor differences between these two types of data, but these differences are not large enough to change the overall trends.

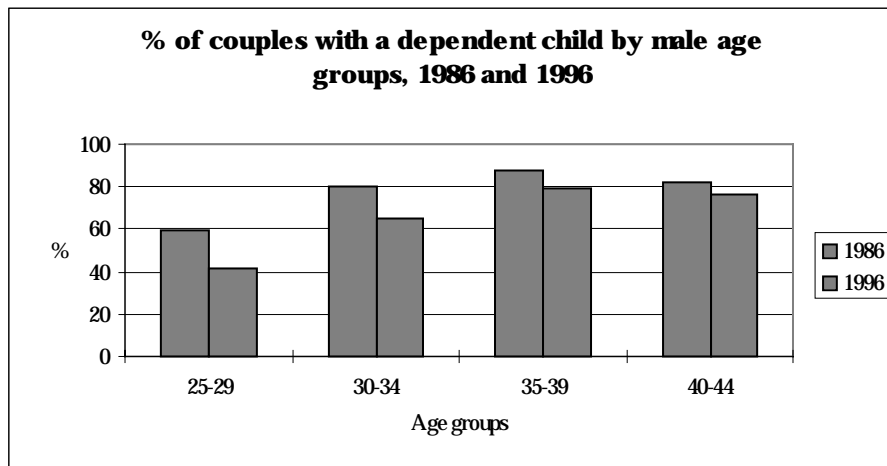
<sup>13</sup> In 1986 there was only a very weak association between formal education and whether men were in couples, so the 1996 data shows a slight strengthening of the association. Education and employment status when combined are a far more powerful predictor of living arrangement than each variable on its own.

<sup>14</sup> In this measure of couples only those in couple only or couple with children households are included. This excludes a small number of couples living in multi-family households. Again, same-sex couples are included in this analysis. In addition, some of the men in couple only and couple with children households will have children from previous relationships who are not living with them.

<sup>15</sup> This delay in starting families appears to have some positive outcomes for involved fathering. For instance, Pool (1999) shows that the older the maternal age the child was born the higher the chance that the father will still be present by the time the child reaches 15 years of age.



Figure 4



Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

When employment status is brought into the analysis, some further complexity emerges. First, Table 1 shows that men who were not in the labour force were far less likely than those men working full-time to be in a childrearing couple in both 1986 and 1996. However, this gap declined between 1986 and 1996. Second, there was an almost universal decline in these age groups in the proportion of men in the labour force who were in couples between 1986 and 1996.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the strongest decline was amongst men who either worked full-time or part-time. This trend, and the increase in the proportion of men not in the labour force who were in couples over the period studied, appears to provide some challenge to theories about men not being in paid work exiting this type of household arrangement. While more information is needed on those men in paid work who are no longer in childrearing couples, such as whether they are generally in insecure low income jobs, the trends suggest that shifts in living arrangements are not simply being driven by changes in paid work.

However, the trend for more men who are not in the labour force to be in childrearing couples seems to mainly reflect the growth in numbers of men in this work status and that this group is becoming less homogeneous. Some of these new men not in the labour force are those in stable long-term relationships who may be well educated and have good job prospects but have actively decided to stay home full-time and look after children, or are perhaps studying part-time and looking after children, while their partner becomes the “breadwinner”.

<sup>16</sup> This includes both employed men and those unemployed and seeking work.

**Table 1: Men in a childrearing couple household\***

	Number (000s)		% of all men in the age group in a childrearing couple		Change in % 1986-1996
	1986	1996	1986	1996	
25-29					
Full-time	39.6	21.7	36	24	-12
Part-time	1.3	1.3	32	19	-13
Unemployed	1.3	1.9	28	22	-6
Non labour force	0.7	2.2	12	17	5
30-34					
Full-time	67.2	51.4	65	50	-15
Part-time	2.0	2.7	56	41	-15
Unemployed	1.3	2.9	42	37	-5
Non labour force	1.1	4.4	23	33	10
35-39					
Full-time	80.1	69.5	77	67	-10
Part-time	2.2	3.6	66	54	-12
Unemployed	1.1	3.1	49	48	-1
Non labour force	1.1	5.1	27	41	14
40-44					
Full-time	65.5	67.5	78	72	-6
Part-time	1.7	3.7	65	58	-7
Unemployed	0.8	2.7	48	51	3
Non labour force	1.0	4.8	29	45	16

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

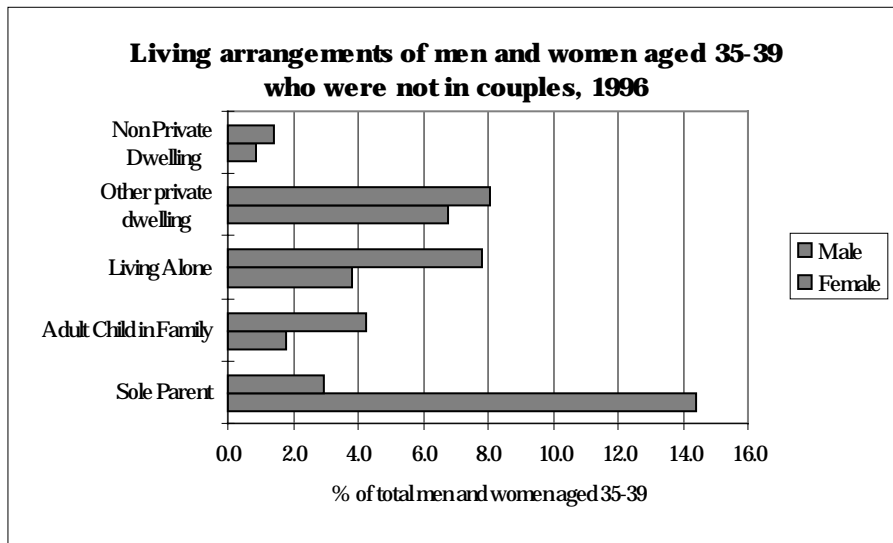
\* This includes both dependent children and independent children.

### Man alone?

Figure 5 shows by their late 30s a small, but significant, group of men outside of couples lived alone. An unknown proportion of these men will, in fact, be fathers who are not living with their biological children. By contrast, in 1996 amongst women in their late 30s who were not in couples, the largest single group were in sole-parent households. While more information is needed, these data potentially suggest that many men who have children, yet are not living with them, are not moving on to re-form new long-term cohabiting relationships, but are living in non-family situations or even returning to live with their own parents.<sup>17</sup> They may still, however, be involved in less formal relationships with another partner (or their original partner), and some of them may be highly involved with their children, despite not living full-time with them.

<sup>17</sup> In the census, questions about fertility are only targeted at women. Potentially, if men were also asked to record how many children they had fathered this would provide a new and useful data source on family living arrangements.

Figure 5



Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

Note: Other private dwellings include households where people live with relatives and those, such as flats, where people are generally not related.

Given the data in Table 2, it is not surprising that in each of the age groups being analysed that men who were not in paid work in 1996 were particularly over-represented amongst the three groups of those living in non-private dwellings, as adult children in families, and in sole father households. As an example, only three percent of those men aged 35-39 who were in full-time work were living as an adult child in a family in 1996, but this rose to nine percent for men not in the labour force. Equally, one percent of men in this age group in full-time work lived in non-private dwellings, but this rose to nine percent of those not in the labour force. This group of men not in the labour force and living in non-private dwellings includes some students and those in prison, although by ages 35-39 these particular populations are relatively small.

Naturally, most of the men not in paid work and who are non-custodial parents will have great difficulties in paying child support. Given the changes in the labour market for low skill men, questions about the ability of governments to enforce child support payments are increasingly being raised (e.g. Birrell and Rapson, 1998; Garfinkel *et al*, 1998). In the recent past, when most men were in paid work on a “family wage”, the state could still expect to financially tie the absent biological father to their children by the means of child support payments from these fathers (Sarre, 1996). In the late 1990s, a significant number of these men are themselves dependent on the state for financial support, or are living with their own parents and are potentially receiving financial support from them. Some of these men could be potentially classified as part of a socially excluded “underclass”, excluded from both paid work and family life.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In Britain, Buckingham (1999) has used longitudinal data to identify an “underclass” of men. While they were defined by work experience (or lack of), education, skill and attitudinal criteria he also found that a key feature of these men was that they were not married. However, he goes on to argue that many are “loners” with two fifths never having had a steady relationship in the previous ten years, and only an insignificant number having fathered a child out of marriage. He

Finally, “marriage market” literature suggests that partners in intact couples tend to have similar levels of qualifications (Callister, 1998b). It is then likely that the former partners of sole-mothers generally had a similar level of formal education to that of the mother. In 1996, women with no, or a low level, of formal qualifications were more likely to live in sole-mother households. This suggests that a higher proportion of poorly educated men, who also have a greater chance of not being in paid work, are likely to be the father in “fatherless” families than well educated men. This would help to partly explain why more men are not classified as looking after children when they are not in paid work.

### **Changing patterns of paid work in two-parent childrearing families**

A final factor explaining why many men who have left the paid workforce are not looking after children full-time is that, when such men are still in childrearing couples, their partner is also likely not to be in paid work.

Census data show that in heterosexual two-parent families, fathers have been dropping out of paid work, while mothers have been increasing their participation in the labour market. Given these two trends, it might be expected that there would be a rise in the proportion of “role-reversal” couples, that is couples where the man stays at home and looks after the children full-time while the female partner takes on the role of “breadwinner”. However, my previous paper has shown that while there was a small increase in the proportion of “role-reversal” couples between 1986 and 1996, there was stronger growth in “no-job” and “two-job” couples (Callister, 1999a).<sup>19</sup> Overall, this has resulted in a major decline in the traditional families where the fathers was the sole breadwinner and the mother stayed home and looked after the children. In the “no-job” couples, the mothers can maintain their traditional childcare role. However, equally in the two-job couples some father will be taking on a greater share of nurturing work.

Overall, these trends would suggest that in two-parent families the decline in the father’s traditional role of income earner has occurred faster than the growth in a new role of fathers looking after children full-time at home. However, it may simply be that the concept of any one parent, whether male or female specialising in looking after a child full-time at home is disappearing. This would then indicate that more indepth study is needed of households in order to determine the nurturing and work (paid and unpaid) roles undertaken by both men and women. However, as suggested by both Breiding-Buss (1999) and Birks (1999), it is becoming more difficult to develop appropriate measures of who might have primary responsibility for various family functions.

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suggests that these particular “loners”, who are excluded from work and family life, cannot be blamed for the higher than average number of illegitimate births in “underclass” neighbourhoods.

<sup>19</sup> These data are for couples with a dependent child under five. Data are also now available from the HLFS which estimate the proportion of couples with children where all those people in that family aged 15-64 were not in paid work. These data indicate that have been on a slight upward trend in the proportion of such couples, rising from around 6 percent in late 1996 to around 7 percent in late 1998.

## 6. CONCLUSION

There are many reasons why a significant number of prime-aged men have left paid work in New Zealand. Some of these are supply side changes, such as some men choosing to look after children full-time, but it appears that this change mostly reflects a shift in labour demand. Given the major changes in the labour market, an increasing number of New Zealand men can no longer assume the role of primary income earner, or even be a significant contributor to family income, in either an intact two-parent family or as a liable parent in a separated family. Without major intervention by the government, it is difficult to see how in the short to medium term the labour market trends for many prime-aged men can be reversed.<sup>20</sup> Also associated with the increase in male non-employment, along with declining incomes for many men, there has been a reduction in the proportion of men in childrearing couples in the age groups studied. There remains much debate in the international literature as to whether there is any direct causation between these two changes. For instance, in New Zealand, employed men have also been a significant part of the decline in couple formation or stability. In addition, in 1996 a higher proportion of prime-aged men who were not in the labour force were in childrearing couples than in 1986. Both these trends reduce the predictive power of labour force status for couple and childrearing status. However, in New Zealand, unemployed men and those who are not in work and no longer seeking it are still much less likely to be in a childrearing couple than men who work full-time. This does lend some support to the idea that external factors, such as the state of the job market, do need to be taken into account when discussing family change in New Zealand. At the same time, family change, such as men choosing to stay home and look after children full-time, choosing to work part-time, or working full-time but not wishing or being able to work long hours due to family commitments, has an impact on the labour market. The data presented also suggests that men in marginal labour market positions are over-represented amongst the biological fathers in “fatherless” families.

The labour market and family data suggest that while changing attitudes could certainly help strengthen families, strengthening the economy may be also be a critical part of assisting families retain some level of cohesion. While an adequate level of financial resources do seem to be associated with a higher level of intact two-parent families, this cohesion does not necessarily require parents to live together. Resources such as adequate housing, money for transport or the ability to access telecommunication systems are often extremely important in allowing non-custodial parents to retain effective relationships with their children. Yet, there remains much debate about how to strengthen the economy. One model would involve further deregulation of the labour market which, while it may create more jobs and higher incomes for many families in the long run, is likely to further disadvantage a significant group of low-skill men. Examples of such deregulation could include removing the minimum wage or reducing job protection measures. In addition, the risk taking, and often highly job focussed,

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<sup>20</sup> Some analysts have suggested that the government could play a role in restoring men (and women) to their traditional role in the family. For example, Fukuyama (1997) suggests that men’s jobs need to be “protected” by the state. It is difficult to see how this could occur, except by draconian and unacceptable means such as payroll tax on women’s wages, job quotas for men, or a “housewife” allowance only available to stay-at-home mothers.

characteristics increasingly required by individuals to succeed in a highly competitive and rapidly changing economy may not be the ideal characteristics required in parents to raise happy, healthy productive children.

Despite the many changes in work and family roles, there is little New Zealand research which can inform us as to how many men are adapting to the new environment. For example, is there a group of low skill men who are making a rational choice not to have children because they can no longer expect to financially support them? How much of male youth suicide can be attributed to a loss of traditional male expectations with regards to work and family? Are narrow stereotypes restricting a significant number of men from finding new roles in both the home and the labour market and, if they are, how could these norms be changed? Many of these issues, and some possible solutions to them, are starting to be raised in discussions about fathers but far more information is needed for effective debates to occur. This will require new datasets to be developed and new questions to be asked in existing surveys.<sup>21</sup> In addition, in future New Zealand research and policy development, “gender analysis” needs to be expanded from its current primary focus on women to include an analysis of the changing position of various groups of men in New Zealand society.

Finally, the changes in employment and family type raise fundamental issues about the support of children. For example, in the emerging globalised economy if a particular group of low skill men (and low skill women) can no longer provide adequate financial support for children, should they be encouraged through the welfare and tax systems not to have children or at least to limit the number of children they have? If this results in below replacement fertility levels for society is this a problem? Should it be biological fathers or, alternatively, social fathers who should be expected to support children? Perhaps concepts of financial support should be widened to all social parents so, for example, female partners in same-sex couples are generally seen as responsible for the financial support of their partner’s biological children. Or perhaps, given that the current flexibility in both relationships and paid work is likely to continue or even increase for many New Zealanders, the raising of children should then be even more of a community responsibility than it currently is.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Birks (1998) raises questions about how separated parents are recorded in the 1996 census.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank Statistics New Zealand for access to census data through the use of the datalab, and both Victoria University and the Social Policy Agency for providing financial support for this research.