

**DO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE  
WHO HAVE BEEN BREACHED BY CENTRELINK  
MATCH THE EXPECTATION AND INTENT  
OF THE HOWARD GOVERNMENT?**

**Thesis submitted to:**

**QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**[School of Humanities and Social Science]**

**FOR THE DEGREE OF:**

**MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (HUMAN SERVICES)**

**SIMON PETER SCHOONEVELDT**

B.Soc.Sci. (Human Services)  
Grad.Dip.Soc.Sci. (Human Services)

**Supervisor: Dr JOHN TOMLINSON**

Submitted to QUT CARSELDINE, June 2002.

## THESIS

DO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WHO  
HAVE BEEN BREACHED BY CENTRELINK MATCH  
THE EXPECTATION AND INTENT OF THE HOWARD  
GOVERNMENT?

### **Statement of Authorship**

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Simon P. Schooneveldt

(Student No. N02103923)

Signed:

Dated:

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Do the lived experiences of people who have been breached by Centrelink match the expectation and intent of the Howard Government?**

In the past three years, the number of breach penalties applied by Centrelink to welfare recipients have more than trebled, with some 349,000 incidences reported for the 2000-2001 year. This Masters Degree research study examines the lived experience of some individuals who have been breached by Centrelink, to ascertain whether their lived experiences accord with the stated policy expectations and intent of the Howard Government. Government policy statements are identified from the literature, as are a range of alternative viewpoints and critiques offered by commentators.

A qualitative research survey instrument was developed. Survey data was collected from people passing on the footpath outside three Brisbane Centrelink offices. Fifty-six individuals who stated they had been breached at least once responded. The results of primary and secondary analysis of the collected data is presented in the findings, followed by discussion as to how the lived experiences of the unemployed respondents matched Government expectation and intent.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION:</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE; SETTING THE SCENE</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Development of welfare programs, compulsory activities and penalties..	5
Entrenched unemployment and the rise of long-term unemployment. ...	10
The Howard Government’s Mutual Obligation ideology.....	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO: CENTRELINK BREACHING POLICY AND PRACTICE</b> .....	<b>20</b>
What is Breaching? .....	20
What are the Coercive Powers of Centrelink?.....	23
How much have rates of beach penalty incidences increased?.....	27
Table 1: Centrelink breaches from 1997 to 2001.....	27
Does the new Job Network contribute to increased breach incidences? 28	28
Does Government rhetoric contribute to increased breach incidences? 31	31
Does developing “policy on the run” increase breach incidences? .....	34
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>37</b>
Choosing a qualitative survey study.....	37
Survey instrument design.....	39
Data collection procedure.....	44
Initial data collection and field observation.....	45
Ethical considerations.....	49
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: SURVEY RESPONSE TALLIES</b> .....	<b>51</b>
Initial survey response tallies and comment.....	51
Figure 1: Survey breach numbers by gender. ....	52
Figure 2: Includes representation of 4 months of 2002 right column.....	53
Figure 3: Categories of assistance sought by respondents.....	63
Table 2: Analysis of gender and age across breaches from respondents... 67	67
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SURVEY FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>Findings on Government expectations regarding breaching policy</b> .....	<b>68</b>
Figure 4: Reported administration versus activity breaches for <i>this survey</i> 72	72
Figure 5: Types of breach penalty received by respondents to <i>this survey</i> 73	73
<b>Findings on Government intent regarding breaching policy</b> .....	<b>74</b>
Figure 6: Diagrammatic representation of the total, higher and lower socio-economic respondents moving into less desirable accommodation.....	82
<b>Findings on Government unstated consequences of breaching</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>85</b>
Government <i>expectation</i> about the effectiveness of coercive practice... 85	85
Government <i>intent</i> about development of self-esteem and fairness. ....	89
An <i>unanticipated</i> consequence of Government breaching policy. ....	94
An <i>unstated</i> Government policy to return welfare to the community. ....	97
<b>CONCLUSION:</b> .....	<b>101</b>
<b>APPENDICES:</b> .....	<b>103</b>
Appendix One: Complete survey instrument with ‘informed consent’ ..	104
Appendix Two: The on-site advertising signs inviting participants.....	112
Appendix Three: Note of visit to Qld. Police and Brisbane Council.....	112
Appendix Four: Courtesy letter to CEO, Centrelink notifying survey. ...	114
Appendix Five: ‘Authorisation to proceed’ letter from UHREC. ....	115
<b>REFERENCE LIST (BIBLIOGRAPHY):</b> .....	<b>116</b>

**INTRODUCTION:**

The central objective of this thesis is to explore the lived experience of people who have received one or more breach penalties from Centrelink, to see if their experiences match the expectation and intent of the breaching policy implemented by the current Howard Coalition Government.

In order to progress development of useful research questions, it was necessary to conduct a formal literature review and also obtain some Government policy statements and Centrelink guideline publications. The status of current legislation, policy and practice was ascertained in regard to breaching, so that it could be defined. Greater understanding was required as to what could have caused the trebling of breach penalties over the last three years, to the level of 349,000 as reported by (ACOSS, 2001b; Pearce, Disney, & Ridout, 2002) for the 2000/2001 year. The literature review is outlined in Chapter One.

Central to the whole issue of breaching penalties appears to be the now entrenched political ideology of Mutual Obligation (Kinnear, 2000; Hartman, 2001; McKenna, 1999), together with entrenched high levels of unemployment (Borland, 2000; Burgess, Mitchell, O'Brien, & Watts, 1998; Edwards, Howard, & Miller, 2001; Mitchell, 2000; Quiggin, 2001). The large majority of people who receive breaches from Centrelink are unemployed, receiving payments under either the New Start Allowance program or the Youth Allowance program (Sleep,

2001, p.2). Both programs include 'activity test' conditions with which unemployment beneficiaries must comply in order to avoid breach penalty.

Understanding derived from this analysis helps to establish a contextual framework, in which to examine the way in which the economic and social reality of high unemployment interacts with neo-liberal political ideology that gives rise to Mutual Obligation policy. The policy appears to underpin various justifications for increases in the number of unemployed people who have been breached by Centrelink. This in turn raised an initial research question; "would Centrelink and the Job Network achieve the policy objectives that the Government had set when establishing and justifying its breaching regime?"

Selection of a qualitative survey for the study was determined by time and resource constraints. A survey instrument was developed, based on an extensive literature review that included 'inside' government perspectives and data. Reports identifying harm done to unemployed individuals when breached were noted, such as Anglicare's assertion that Centrelink's "punish first" approach was costly for individuals (Rollason, 2001), and ACOSS (2000) report that "obligations on unemployed people were unreasonable and unfair" (p.2).

This study found that people who were breached had their lives seriously affected in one or more of four important areas, which the Howard Government does not publicly acknowledge as being expected or intended. One finding

indicated that as a result of being breached, most survey respondents reported experiencing decreased self-esteem. A second finding indicated that most respondents had strong feelings of being unfairly treated. A third finding indicated that many respondents needed to move into less desirable accommodation as a consequence of breaching. A fourth finding reinforced the notion that the Howard Government is pressuring social security welfare recipients to move 'off-benefit', onto the support of family and community charities.

## CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE; SETTING THE SCENE

### Development of welfare programs, compulsory activities and penalties.

Since the British occupied Australia, there has been little social willingness to share community wealth with those deemed 'work-shy' or the unworthy poor (Hall, 1998; Windschuttle, 1980). Clarke (1998) observed: "The Aboriginal custom of sharing resources was not understood, and settlers began to accuse the natives of being *lazy* thieves who preferred to steal the colonists' flour and crops of fruit and vegetables, rather than *do an honest days work*" (p.62, italics added). The colonists did not acknowledge they had stolen the productive land from the Aborigines. Welfare assistance from the State, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, divided individuals "as existing either side of a deserving/undeserving binary divide" (Hall, 1998, p. 3). von Hayek (2000) recognised paternalistic government allocation of welfare to individuals, which was divided into quantities "which it thinks they need or deserve" (p. 93), and that divide continues to exist (Hammer, 2002).

Hartman (2001) cited Gwyther: "The old 'shame game', where compliance to community norms was enforced by public humiliation or social exclusion for infringements" (p. 5) is still played today, evidenced by Government entreaties to "dob in a dole bludger" (Vanstone, 2002b). While declaring "only a small proportion" of welfare recipients are undeserving or not entitled to benefits,

Government Ministers continue to use emotive language, such as “flushing out the dole cheats” (Brough, 2001, p.8), designed to give the impression that people who receive welfare payments are unwilling to accept work (Vanstone, 2002b), or are ‘welfare dependant’ (Newman, 2000). Unemployed people are therefore ‘undeserving’ and in need of ‘coercive authority’ to return them to a state of worthiness (Atkins, 2002; Kinnear, 2000, p.10).

Bryson (1993) noted that the term ‘welfare’ in Australia does not apply to all citizens, but is “applied selectively to those who... are seen as not able to provide for themselves...those who are poor or relatively poor”. She believed those notions were graphically illustrated by a negative description of welfare services as “a safety net” (p. 464). However Sleep (2001) found welfare compliance provisions to be a “mechanism of social control” (p. 1).

The Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, DEWRSB (2001) reported that “compliance strategies” are not new. Activity testing has long been a key function in the administration of income–support systems, where job seekers could be compelled to participate in programs “or risk losing their benefits” (p.9).

In 2000, Ian Sharples, Director, Employment Strategies Section, Parenting Payment and Labour Market Branch, Department of Family and Community Services, together with Assistant Director, Jillian Moses, presented a paper at the

7<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Unemployment at Campbelltown NSW. That paper is often cited in this study, because it is one of few 'inside' commentaries available on breaching practices from within the Department, which is a major 'purchaser' of the Centrelink welfare delivery system.

Moses and Sharples (2000) refer to the penalty loss or reduction of benefit imposed by Centrelink as a 'breach' and refer to the general practice as 'breaching'. Admitting that their Department has a 'hard line' approach to breaching (p. 17), they noted that non-payment penalties were originally called 'postponement periods', for breaches of activity requirements and voluntary unemployment. These have been a "feature of the administration of social security payments for the unemployed in Australia" since 1947 (p.2).

Breaching applies particularly to unemployment recipients who have activity tests applied to them. Activity tests are designed to ensure adherence to mandatory job search programs, such as Work for the Dole. Terms such as 'dole system', 'doling out' and 'dole bludgers' derived from the practice of doling out food to unemployed people on 'susso' lines during the Great Depression (Hartman, 2001; Windschuttle, 1980). This pejorative language would be 'politically incorrect' today, if developed for people who have disabilities, or are of different race, culture or mature age. For 'the unemployed' it remains politically acceptable (Vanstone, 2002b; Atkins, 2002).

Tomlinson (1999) pointed out that “when this denigration of the workless started, official unemployment was less than 4%, it now stands at over 7%”. He argued that whilst a greater percentage of people than ever before are now in the labour market, “we are still asked to believe that the ranks of the unemployed are swelled by those unwilling to work” (p. 1).

Post World War II, soaring unemployment began in the 1970's. Burgess, Mitchell, O'Brien and Watts (2000) cited Jones: “public expenditure on unemployment benefits increased from \$8.8 m. in 1970 to \$925.2m. in 1980” (p.175). Concern for fiscal blowout and belief that unemployed people were not trying hard enough to find jobs began to unsettle governments of Liberal and Labor persuasions (Edwards et al., 2001; Giddens, 1998). Whilst the 1947 Unemployment Benefit legislation first brought a compulsory activity component (Moses & Sharples, 2000), the Whitlam Labor Government first brought in an employment assistance program combined with a compulsory component (Sawer, 2000).

Then Minister for Social Security, Hayden initially “abolished the provision which allowed the Department to deem someone ‘unworthy’” based upon his personal perception of a right to benefit entitlement, “except in situations which were specifically precluded by social security legislation” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 3). By 1974, moving away from this ‘rights’ viewpoint, Ministers Hayden and Cameron subsequently began casting slurs about unemployed people being “work shy lion tamers” and “dole bludgers” (Windschuttle, 1980, pp. 180-190). Professor Bettina

Cass proposed “extending the work testing of unemployed people to encompass activity testing” (Lawrence, 2002).

Sawer (2000) cited Eardley’s report that it was the Hawke Government that brought in “reciprocal obligation” which meant that unemployment (dole) payments became increasingly dependent on compliance and activity requirements of some sort. “In 1986 the minimum postponement [of payment] was re-set at 2 weeks. In 1987, 1989 and 1990 additional reasons were added for imposing a non-payment penalty” (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p.3). Burgess et al. (2000) reported that preparedness to look to work tests were replaced by more extensive activity tests in 1990.

The Keating Labor Government produced a 1994 white paper, entitled *Working Nation*, to introduce *reciprocal obligation* for the long-term unemployed. Extensive changes to breaching arrangements included new legislation to establish distinction between administrative and activity test breaches, with harsher penalties imposed for activity test breaches. “Penalties for both types of breach increased with duration on [sic] payment and with each subsequent breach” (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p. 3). See also (Quiggin, 2001, p. 10).

With the advent of the Howard Government, Burgess et al. (2000) argued that continuing fiscal pressure for balanced budgets together with continuing restructuring of the State in Australia “will force unemployment assistance to be

subject to further eligibility tests, reciprocal obligations and extended sanctions". Unemployment payments were no longer a right "but were now made conditional upon participation in employment programs" (pp. 174-186). Castles (2001) argued that "the Government is well on the way to restoring the conditionality of payment which makes welfare a charity rather than a right" (p. 102). Entrenched unemployment appears to influence Howard Government policy and rhetoric.

### **Entrenched unemployment and the rise of long-term unemployment.**

An understanding of the current breaching regime cannot be developed without recognition of what Burgess et al. (2000) called the "entrenched long-term unemployment" levels in Australia (p. 177), because the large majority of people who receive Centrelink penalty breaches receive unemployment benefits.

"Unemployment has increased dramatically in Australia since the mid-1970's". Even the economic upturns in the late 1980's and late 1990's were not enough to restore the unemployment rate to the level held in the early 1970's, before the first oil shock. "Over the last two decades, the lowest rate of unemployment was 5.4 per cent (November 1989)" (Borland, 2000, p.1).

By contrast; "in 1974 the rate of unemployment was less than 3 per cent" (Watts, 2001, p. 3). Bagnall (1999) reported that "unemployment spending has gone from 0.03% of GDP [Gross Domestic Product] to 1.13% over the past three

decades – the largest single contributor to the total increase in [Departmental Welfare Benefit] spending” (p. 48).

Bell observed that “despite the OECD Jobs Study (1994), there is increasing scepticism about the capacity of neo-liberal reforms to reduce high unemployment rates that have prevailed in most OECD economies since the mid-1970’s” (cited in Watts, 2001, p.5). In Australia, the scepticism is well documented. Quiggin (2001) asserted that “recent developments in the labour market provide clear evidence of the failure of the economic policies adopted since the election of the Howard Government” whilst noting that rising unemployment is “likely to reach 7.5 per cent by 2002” (p. 3).

Mitchell (2000) argued that the private employment sector could not absorb all unemployment during the period of public service cutbacks and massive privatisations that arose from economic fundamentalist policies, especially those of the Howard Government, which had “chosen to abandon the full employment ideal”. Mitchell considered that “until the public sector restores a commitment to full employment, Australia will languish with high unemployment and the resulting increases in inequality” (p.32).

Graetz and McAllister (1988) considered that “systematic inequalities emerge as a consequence of unequal social origins” which generate workforce unemployment (p. 206). However by 1994 it was obvious to many commentators

that there were simply not enough jobs, regardless of social origin or skill levels (Langmore & Quiggin, 1994). Burgess et al. (1998) argued “demand deficiency” was the cause of the unemployment problem (p.17). Any perceived skill deficiency of unemployed people was not to blame for the high rates of unemployment in Australia, argued The Courier Mail; “Jobs the only real welfare reform” required to reduce unemployment levels (Editorial, 1999).

McKinnon and Dorries (1999) reported almost 700,000 jobless in March, 1999, “having peaked this decade at 946,000 in September 1993” and “the major constraint for the unemployed finding a job was not wages but a lack of job offers” (p.4). See also (Borland, 2000). Noting that the economy had improved and unemployment had reduced, Quiggin (2001) found that employers “seek increased hours of work and extra effort from existing workers” rather than taking on new workers, concluding that “the basic problem is a simple shortage of job vacancies” (p. 8).

Thus with high unemployment levels came a rise in the number of people who are long-term unemployed (Bagnall, 1999, p. 48). Burgess et al. (1998) reported “in Australia the average duration of unemployment rose from three weeks in 1966...to 50.5 weeks in 1998”, while long-term unemployment (defined as one year or longer) share of total unemployment has increased over the past twenty years “from 12.3% (1978) to 36.2%” (p.3). ACOSS (1998) cited Gregory and Sheehan, who put the 1999 figure at 31% (p. 3).

Just two years later, Minister Newman reported 722,000 people received unemployment benefits in the current year, with 457,000 of those people (60 per cent) “having received benefits for longer than one year” (Newman, 2000, p. 9). Increasingly, however, jobs are now more often part-time, casualised, short-term and low paid. As a consequence people often find themselves “churning” between short-term unemployment welfare and short-term temporary paid work (Lawrence, 2002). This suggests the long-term unemployed cannot ‘churn’ because there are insufficient jobs.

Continuing high levels of unemployment and welfare expenditure have focused the Howard Government in pursuing an ideologically driven economic fundamentalist agenda, based upon its perceptions of the efficiency of private enterprise and ‘globalisation’ (Bronson & Rousseau, 1996; Donald, 2000; Held, 1995; Hutchings, 1998; Jones & May, 1998; Strange, 1996). The Government continues to announce initiatives designed to compel people to urgently look for work and engage in programs, such as the *Work for the Dole* program, which it justifies by using the ideology of *Mutual Obligation* (Burgess et al., 1998, p.7).

It is worth noting that Neuman (1997) described *ideologies* as having “fixed, strong, and unquestioned assumptions...full of unquestioned absolutes and normative categories” (p. 38). Lauritsen (2001) argued that the Government, in “emphasising the responsibility of individuals and their families, and disciplining those who fail in their obligations” has shifted the accent “from one of a lack of

employment to a problem with unemployed individuals” (pp. 13-14). See also (Titmuss, 2000, pp.47-48; Watts, 2001 p. 5). However, as Jennings (2001) noted; “it is contentious that government promotes mutual obligation policy within a climate of insufficient employment and with no consideration to structural barriers” (p. 5).

This contentiousness is also grounded in van Parijs' (2000) observation that “the indignation of the jobless who are morally and legally expected to keep looking for what many know they will never find, is matched by the outrage of those who subsidize with their social security contributions the idleness of people who are overtly transgressing the rules of the game” (p. 357). Upon these unproven premises, sanctions against unemployed people continue to be justified under the ideology of Mutual Obligation

### **The Howard Government’s Mutual Obligation ideology.**

In discussing the Howard Government’s introduction of the policy of Mutual Obligation, Quiggin (2001) considered crucial change was embodied in a rhetorical shift from ‘reciprocal obligation’ to Mutual Obligation. “The substantive shift associated with this change in rhetoric was a unilateral restatement of the government’s side of the obligation”. Under Mutual Obligation, “the obligations of government are discharged by the payment of benefits” alone, because the Howard Government “has declined to specify any full employment target” (p. 12).

Burgess et al. (2000) reported 1997 Work for the Dole legislation was enacted by the Howard Government to embrace the concept of “*mutual obligation*”. The Bill (*Social Security Amendment Bill*) was “designed specifically to remove those legislative provisions preventing recipients from being required to work for their unemployment benefits” (pp.174-178, italics in original). ACOSS (2001a) noted “the administration of the activity test was tightened” in 1997, when Mutual Obligation was introduced, and decried the consequent negative effects that the tightening had on unemployment benefit recipients (p.3).

Prime Minister Howard described Mutual Obligation in terms whereby the Government should support those in genuine need. However he also noted “it is the case that – to the extent that it is within their capacity to do so – those in receipt of such assistance should give something back to society in return, and in the process improve their own prospects for self-reliance” (Howard, 1999, p.10). ‘Giving something back to society’ could include specified volunteer work, study to improve employment prospects or Work for the Dole.

Under the headline “Howard’s Tough Love”, McKenna (1999) quoted Minister Newman: “an increasing number of older unemployed are not required to chase jobs as hard as their younger counterparts”. Minister Newman was reported to believe this created a fiscal burden on the nation, encouraged “welfare dependence” and created “a very severe stigma” on people who remain on

welfare support. The Minister decried the idea that “people can go on payments and they can stay on payments forever” (p. 11).

The next year, Minister Anthony announced tightened activity test requirements were to be incorporated in new Preparing for Work Agreements. He stated that “mutual obligation is based on the proposition that unemployed people supported financially by the community should actively seek work, constantly strive to improve their competitiveness in the labour market and give something back to the community”, adding “this leaves people with a sense of pride and belonging...” (Anthony, 2000, p.1; Richardson, 2000).

Shortly thereafter, Ministers Reith and Newman announced that in future “all job seekers would have to fulfill some form of mutual obligation service in exchange for their support benefit” (Burgess et al., 2000, p.180). In a joint paper, Ministers Vanstone and Abbott foreshadowed the broadening of Mutual Obligation and activity test requirements to include single parents with school age children and older unemployed people. Their rationale was that the new requirements “will keep people active and connected” to their community whilst looking for work (McKenna, 1999; Vanstone & Abbott, 2001, p.4).

Minister Brough followed through, announcing that under principles of Mutual Obligation; “All jobless up to the age of 50 will be targeted for Work for the Dole programs” (Jackman, 2002, p. 5). See also (Centrelink, 2001a). Burgess et al.

(2000) considered the Howard Government had enacted the most radical transformation of labour market policy since 1945. "The unemployed have been given citizenship and community obligations, unlike any other group in the community receiving either welfare or public sector assistance, such as tariffs, subsidies, tax concessions, price stabilisation measures, production subsidies and age pensions" (p.178)

Burgess et al. (2000) continued "Mutual obligation has now become a hallmark of the unemployment benefit system in Australia". Obligation now rests more firmly on the unemployed than on Government. The unemployed "are subject to more surveillance, duties, and punitive measures than previously", in part because (citing Pike): "the means testing of benefits and tighter eligibility criteria indicate that Government sees recipients as [a] burden to the public" (pp.180-181). However Quiggin (2001) recognised that the Howard Government's employment welfare programs, including Work for the Dole and activity tests, were politically popular (pp. 11-12).

Political popularity is carefully nurtured by the Howard Government, and is reflected in the Government's re-election to a third term. For example, Minister Newman released a government commissioned Roy Morgan research report on community attitudes towards the unemployed which predictably found that "most people (92%) thought that unemployed recipients should be required to undertake activities that would improve their chances of finding a job" (Morgan,

2000, p.15). See also the “acceptability” level of activity test requirements reported in another Government commissioned survey (Wallis, 2000, p. 8).

Grattan noted, cited in Burgess et al. (2000), that unemployment programs such as “*Work for the Dole* have been described purely as a political gesture to appease commonly held prejudices about unemployed youth” (p.181). The Government and the press now focus beyond youth. The Courier Mail’s Jackman (2002) headlined; “Work for dole net to widen” with a sub heading; “Unemployed older workers have been put on notice: The days of collecting the dole with no strings attached will end on July 1” in 2002 (p. 5). The ‘strings that have been attached’ since 1947 escape attention, as do the morally and ethically questionable aspects of Mutual Obligation.

Kinnear (2000) found that imposing obligation only upon the least well-off in society eroded “the ethical case for a social contract”. Further, when those in positions of social advantage demand social repayments from those who are disadvantaged, as happens under Mutual Obligation policy, that “may be a *manifestation* of moral decline” (p. VI, italics in original). Goodin (2001) argued that obliging people to sign contractual activity agreements in return for welfare benefits lacked moral force. The notion “agree or starve” (without benefit payment) was analogous to the highway robber’s demand “your money or your life!” (p. 191).

Rees (2000) discussed the loss of human rights resulting from Mutual Obligation. He warned that when a government “emphasises that rights have to be earned, that people can only insist on their rights if they have carried out their social responsibilities...it softens a general public for the idea that rights are conditional, not universal” (pp. 296-297). Tomlinson (1999) argued that “the words ‘welfare dependency’ have taken on connotations of abuse, of failing to meet legitimate responsibilities, and something just short of cheating or defrauding the State” (pp. 3-4). Chapter Two, following, details Centrelink breaching policy and practice.

## **CHAPTER TWO: CENTRELINK BREACHING POLICY AND PRACTICE**

### **What is Breaching?**

Breaching measures involve penalties that reduce or stop payment of benefit for a period. Breach penalties are mainly targeted towards unemployed people in receipt of unemployment payments. The payments are administered by Centrelink under either New Start Allowance or Youth Allowance programs, and include Austudy.

In July 1997 the Government had its thrice-amended breach penalty program passed by Parliament. The second reading of the bill noted that the main objective was “to maintain a strong deterrence for failure to meet reasonable requirements”. It was thought that rigorous application of activity test requirements was important to maintain community support for the system of unemployment payments and to encourage active job search by beneficiaries (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p. 4).

The parliamentary speech also cited an OECD Job Study’s conclusion that “a priori reasoning and historical evidence both suggest that if benefit administration can be kept tight, the potential disincentive effects of benefit entitlement will be largely contained” (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p.4). However, there are many commentators who argue strongly that the notion of disincentive effects is largely

mythical (Gilmour, Hartman, & Jennings, 2000, p. 4; Goodin, 2001; Pearce et al., 2002; Windschuttle, 1980, p.175).

Centrelink is an umbrella Commonwealth Government agency that delivers welfare distribution services to the public. Several government agencies 'purchase' Centrelink delivery services, including Department of Family and Community Services (DfaCS), and Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB). Centrelink also administers various social security programs, such as the Age Pension, Disability Support Pension and various Unemployment allowances legitimated under the Social Security Act. Thus Centrelink facilitates payment of set benefits and allowances to people who become 'recipients' when they can demonstrate entitlement.

Centrelink breach policy is part of a compliance control strategy (DEWSRB, 2001), whereby Centrelink is authorised to temporarily withhold partial or total payment from a welfare recipient deemed to be in breach of a Centrelink requirement. Sleep, (2001) defined a Centrelink breach occurred when, "according to a Centrelink officer, [customers] should be financially punished for not satisfactorily complying with their activity test or administrative duties" (p.2).

Activity test breaches are now more often applied by Centrelink than are administrative breaches (ACOSS, 2001b). Activity test breach penalty rates are more costly for recipients (Moses & Sharples, 2000; Sleep, 2001), and are

applicable to benefit payments that have an activity test requirement, including Youth Allowance, New Start Allowance and Austudy (Sleep, 2001, p.2). Activity test requirements extend to the national Job Network of privately owned, publicly funded employment training and placement agencies. Centrelink (2001b) explained: "Failure to turn up for interviews, without an adequate reason, may result in a breach penalty being imposed, regardless of whether the appointment was made by Centrelink or a Job Network member" (p. 1).

Payment recipients subject to activity tests can also be breached for failure to comply with Centrelink administrative requirements, as can other categories of beneficiaries such as people who receive Partner Allowance, Parenting Payment and Disability Support Pensions. Administrative matters such as failing to reply to a Centrelink letter or not advising change of address can incur an administrative breach. "If you do not meet an administrative requirement, you are likely to have your payment reduced by 16 per cent for 13 weeks or receive no payment for two weeks" (Centrelink, 2001a, pp. 1-2). Although non-cumulative, such administrative breaches can be continually reapplied.

Activity test penalties can reduce payments differentially depending on whether they are first, second or third penalties in a two-year period. "The first penalty attracts an 18 per cent reduction in payment for 26 weeks. The second penalty attracts a 24 per cent rate reduction in payment for 26 weeks whilst the third and following penalties mean no payment for eight weeks" (Centrelink, 2001a). There

are approximately “ 40 activity test breach reasons and 16 administrative breach reasons” (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p.6).

### **What are the Coercive Powers of Centrelink?**

There is a strong coercive element within Centrelink aimed at ‘encouraging’ the unemployed to move ‘off-benefit’. Richardson (2000) examined the departure ‘off-benefit’ of recipients who were threatened or obligated with a compulsory Centrelink activity, compared to those not threatened. She found “strong evidence that the threat of additional activity requirements...has a positive impact on the probability of individuals...leaving” New Start Allowance (p. 2).

Richardson (2000) finding tends to support the threat or “stick” hypothesis of Centrelink’s policy, however she also found that “empirical evidence seems to indicate that exposure to the MOI [Mutual Obligation Initiative] does not alter the probability of returning to NSA [New Start Allowance] receipt” (p. 17). This supports the argument that welfare recipients have no choice other than to accept welfare payments. Moses and Sharples (2000) offered no Departmental insight as to where the ‘off benefit’ customers might have gone prior to returning to ‘on-benefit’ status. The DEWSRB (2000) Job Network Net Impact study acknowledged “that 20% to 31% of individuals who were engaged in various programs became ‘off-benefit’”, but it had no information “as to why people left these programs” (p. 2).

ACOSS (2001a) obtained a copy of INTRALINK , Centrelink's internal policy manual for officer's guidance. A selection of items follow:

- “there is **no** requirement to contact a jobseeker” unless the breach recommendation is from a Job Network provider and relates to “failure to attend to negotiate an Activity Agreement”
- “job seekers **must not** be given benefit of the doubt”, and
- “where a breach is imposed and a job seeker requests a review, the officer “who made the original decision **must** conduct the ... interview”

(p.6, bolding emphasis is as per original Centrelink document)

Centrelink INTRALINK guidelines advise that breaches should be made without consultation with another officer, but a decision made “NOT to impose a breach should only be made after consultation with another officer” (ACOSS, 2001a, p.7). This directive appears to be at odds with what one would expect, given the serious consequences of breaching for individual recipients. The directive appears to come very close to a denial of natural justice as outlined by (Moses & Sharples, 2000) and indicated by the Ombudsman (McLeod, 2001).

The directive also gives clear insight into Centrelink policy that places pressure upon Centrelink officers to apply breaches with some impunity.

MacDonald and Abello (2001) found there was “increased pressure from the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB)” on the Job Network and Centrelink to increase breaching (p.3).

Small changes to this policy, effective July 2002, have recently been announced by Minister Vanstone (Vanstone, 2002a, p. 1) and will be detailed later in this chapter.

DEWSRB (2001) believed that the mere compulsory aspect of job program participation, rather than voluntary participation, “can have an effect on behaviour”. DEWSRB suggested that compulsion strategies have a “positive motivational effect – or what evaluators call the deterrent effect – on job seekers’ continued reliance on income support” because it encourages beneficiaries to increase their efforts to find employment, often with success, in preference to program participation. DEWSRB also noted a “reporting effect” whereby people suspected of claiming benefits inappropriately may “opt to move ‘off-benefit’ rather than attend training programs, in order to avoid disclosing job activities and earnings” (p.11). These ideas rely on anecdotal evidence and ingrained community suspicions.

Government Departments admit having no idea what becomes of people who move ‘off-benefit’, for whatever reason, and express having an interest only in recording the numerical reduction of people who have moved ‘off-benefit’ (DEWSRB, 1999; Moses & Sharples, 2000, p.17). The Commonwealth Ombudsman’s 2001 report noted Centrelink was too quick to breach: “Financial penalties are imposed on Newstart Allowance Recipients (NSA) who are considered not to have complied with activity or administrative requirements”.

This non-compliance breach penalty involves reduction or cessation of payment for a period of time. “These penalties usually result in extreme financial hardship, and should not be imposed without due process” (McLeod, 2001, p.51).

Moses and Sharples (2000) considered “it is probable that the increased breach rate is not so much a result of changes to the penalty regime as it is a result of the introduction on new activity test requirements” (pp.11- 12). ACOSS (2001b) reported “third time breaches have doubled as a proportion of all Activity Test breaches from 7% to 14%” between 1999-00 and 2000-01” (p.9). Third time breaches mean cessation of all payment for 8 weeks. ACOSS also pointed out that a third time activity breach, when added to the first and second breach, total a “fine” or loss of benefit of \$3,384, a higher ‘punishment’ than is applied for many criminal offences (pp. 3 -11).

The ethical and social implications of Mutual Obligation were examined for The Australia Institute by Kinnear (2000), who found that “the ethical foundations of the Howard Government’s Mutual Obligation policies do not stand up to scrutiny” on a number of grounds. One ground questioned whether “Australia’s system of economic management [which] has relied on creating joblessness to sustain economic growth” is just. Another ground was that in the context of Australian structural unemployment, proponents of Mutual Obligation willingly impose requirements on unemployed people. The proponents believe “that unemployed people have some control over their joblessness, and therefore a choice to

accept or reject welfare benefits". However the proponents "are mistaken, because realistically, there is no choice" (p. V).

### **How much have rates of beach penalty incidences increased?**

The number of Breach penalties issued by Centrelink has trebled in the past 3 years. ACOSS, (2001b) produced Table 1 (below) that gives a clear picture of the increase during the past nearly 4 years. An estimated extrapolation for the full year 2000-2001 is shown in Right hand column of Table 1.

**Table 1: Centrelink breaches from 1997 to 2001.**

	<b>1997-1998</b>	<b>1998-1999</b>	<b>1999-2000</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>
<b>Type of Breach</b>	(July-June)	(July-June)	(July-June)	(July-Feb)	(July-June)
Activity Test Breach	60,981	88,751	177,759	166,485	250,100
Administrative Breach	59,737	76,741	124,735	65,915	99,000
Total	120,718	165,492	302,494	232,400	349,100

Source: Sydney Welfare Rights Centre as cited in (ACOSS, 2001b, p.5).

From within the Department of Family and Community Services, Moses and Sharples (2000) reported that "breach numbers increased by 50 per cent between 1998-99 and 1999-00 but the number of people breached increased by only 30 per cent". They also reported that generally "fifty per cent of people with an activity breach also have an administrative breach. This suggests that a growing number of people are having difficulty meeting their requirements on an ongoing basis" (p.16).

Sleep (2001) observed that “both activity test breaches and administrative breaches also increased greatly from 1997 to 2000”. Administrative breaches were predominant in 1997, but by 2000 activity breaches were approximately one third greater than administrative breaches” (p. 5). These findings accord with the ACOSS figures given above, and were confirmed by Pearce et al. (2002).

### **Does the new Job Network contribute to increased breach incidences?**

Moses and Sharples (2000) conceded that “significant rises in the breach rate do appear to have coincided with the implementation of major initiatives” such as the Job Network, Mutual Obligation and Work for the Dole. “Possibly the clearest link which can be drawn is between the establishment of the Job Network in May 1998 and the subsequent rise in breach numbers” (p. 12).

Moses and Sharples (2000) reported 21 per cent of breaches imposed in 1998-99 and 24 per cent in 1999-00 were attributable to the Job Network, and in both years these figures represented “less than 50 per cent of all breaches recommended by the Job Network” (p. 12). Hannon (2002) reported that in 2001, 46 per cent of breach recommendations issued by the Job Network were accepted and applied by Centrelink.

MacDonald and Abello (2001) reported this increase was due to “increased pressure” on the Job Network by DEWRSB to recommend breaches more readily

(p. 3). However, there had also been implemented “a paperless breach process” (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p. 10). A computer generated random referral system run by Centrelink, compulsorily directs unemployed people to attend Job Network interviews and programs, such as Work for the Dole, as part of activity test requirements. The system also generates ‘possible’ breaches automatically, and ACOSS (2001b) reported that this referral system has “resulted in a *significant increase* in the number of breaches related to these programs” (p. 3, italics added). DEWRSB (2001) admitted that its “auto-referral process for JST [Job Start Training] supports compliance effects” (p.10).

Interestingly, Centrelink complained to the Productivity Commission about these automated systems, claiming they were inefficient, because 54 per cent of breach recommendations received from the Job Network had to be rejected due to lack of evidence or due process (Hannon, 2002). From a different perspective, the Commonwealth Ombudsman noted that there was indeed increased pressure on the Job Network to apply breaches to customers without evidence or due process, and such recommendations were being readily accepted and processed by Centrelink (McLeod, 2001).

MacDonald and Abello (2001) reported that the third round of Government contracts for the Job Network included a “sharper focus on meeting DEWRSB key performance indicators”, including increased breaching levels. This pressure created an “ethical dilemma of the transfer of government responsibilities to

agencies in becoming more responsible for the policing of client's job search activities" (pp. 3-6). Individuals who are breached on the recommendation of a Job Network member cannot appeal to that Job Network member, because Centrelink has the legislated delegation and controls the complex appeals process initially (Sleep, 2001). The Ombudsman and ACOSS found breaches were made without 'due process' (McLeod, 2001, p.52; ACOSS, 2001a).

Moses and Sharples (2000) referred to the importance for Centrelink officers "generally" to contact customers before breaching them, "to ensure that the person is given the opportunity to provide information that may explain why they were unable to meet their requirements". This is because, when determining a breach, including those recommended by third parties such as Job Network providers, the process needs to be "both consistent with principles of natural justice and legislative requirements" under the Social Security Act (pp. 6-7).

Moses and Sharples (2000) noted a person should only be taken to have failed the activity test or administrative requirements if they did so "without reasonable excuse". It follows that "a determination that a person has so failed cannot therefore be made until the reason for the failure has been established" (pp.6-7).

Due process and ethics will be revisited in later chapters.

### **Does Government rhetoric contribute to increased breach incidences?**

Rhetoric plays an important part in justifying and promoting the compliance process. Odgers (2001) quoted Employment Services Minister Brough discussing the number of unemployment benefit recipients who 'opt to have their unemployment benefits cancelled'. 20,700 people in 1999-2000 apparently went "off benefit" in preference to participating in compulsory job training courses, because the Government was "flushing out the dole cheats" (p. 8).

Connotations of the human bodily waste disposal system were followed up with the Minister's ideological notion that "compliance is a very strong motivator and obviously some of these people either couldn't be bothered finding a job or were already in paid employment and therefore couldn't attend the full time courses. Either way they've now been flushed out of the system and are no longer collecting payments they're not entitled to" (Odgers, 2001, p. 8), implying there could have been no other circumstances under which people move 'off-benefit'.

ACOSS (2001a) believed that "constant 'job snobs' type comments by Government Ministers have meant that many Centrelink officers feel they have been granted political license to harass job-seekers" (p.7) by increasing breach rates. This is not a new phenomenon. Windschuttle (1980) reported that the Fraser Coalition Government quickly began to pressure the then (1976) Commonwealth Employment Service "to take a get-tough policy" against

suspected “dole bludgers” and unemployed people considered inappropriately dressed or groomed (pp. 218-219).

Bridgman and Davis (2000) found that this kind of interpretation risked program objectives being “lost amid bureaucratic politics” (p. 120). Minister Newman’s declarations that jobless welfare recipients are now “welfare dependant” and need to be “helped off-benefit” (Newman, 2000, p.11) continues to influence bureaucrats. ACOSS (2001a) observed that for Centrelink, the “notion of social security legislation as beneficial legislation” had disappeared (p.7). See also Johnstone (2001) on the toughening of Mutual Obligation requirements.

Moses and Sharples (2000) acknowledged continuing rises in numbers of people being breached, and suggested this could be due to Centrelink staff being “more willing to impose breaches” since the advent of graduated breach penalties. Recipients would not now lose total payment for their first offence. As self-described ‘hard liners’, the authors wryly noted that increased breach numbers were probably *not* what lobbyists for abolition of first penalty total payment cessation had in mind (pp. 11-12).

Minister Vanstone continued the rhetoric; “people receiving welfare payments get exactly what they are entitled – no more and no less. That’s why compliance measures are necessary” because they saved taxpayers some 550 million dollars over the past three years”. Although not highlighted, this amount covers

all welfare areas, not just unemployment. The Minister continued; “while the vast majority of people who receive welfare payments are honest and entitled to those payments, there is a small number of people who still seek to cheat their fellow Australians. These people will be caught” (Vanstone, 2002b, pp.1-2; Cole, 2002).

To balance the rhetoric on welfare fraud, Sleep (2001) reported (citing ACOSS) that welfare fraud represented “less than 0.1%” of customers were “found to have fraudulently obtained benefits” (p. 4). Of approximately 6 million welfare recipients who currently receive a payment from Centrelink, this proportion represents a minuscule total of some 6000 individuals. Minister Vanstone’s ‘declared’ savings for taxpayers over 3 years averaged \$183 million per year (Vanstone, 2002b, pp. 1-2; Cole, 2002).

The rhetoric on welfare fraud, which justifies “catching dole bludgers” to save \$183 million *annually* that taxpayers are “cheated” out of, may be better understood when evaluated against a quantum reported by the Taxation Commissioner. An estimated minimum of approximately \$5.4 *billion* (up to a maximum estimate of \$20.7 *billion*) per *annum* has been ‘cheated’ from the taxation office by taxpayers operating in the income earning environment and the ‘black’ economy (Madigan, 2002). Smith (1993) noted: “There was a perception, not altogether unfounded, that many people were not paying their [tax] dues”. For wage and salary earners “it was ‘pay-as-you-earn’, for many others of greater means, it was ‘pay-as-you-like’” (p. 110).

The literature suggests that 'welfare cheating' and 'dole bludging' generates far greater public opprobrium than does 'tax cheating', regardless of the real cost to community. However, the opportunism that politicians exhibit when inciting this opprobrium, to divert attention away from other pressing political issues, is well understood (Editorial, 2002, p. 10). See also (Boreham & Hall, 1993; Quiggin, 2001, pp. 11-12).

### **Does developing "policy on the run" increase breach incidences?**

Although the slogan 'work for the dole' was politically popular, "no corresponding policy proposal existed" at the time of Howard's 1997 Work for the Dole program announcement, which came as a surprise. As Opposition Leader Howard had specifically rejected Work for the Dole type programs prior to his election. After election, the quick implementation of the program was considered a "political imperative" so that the Government could be seen to be 'doing something' about the 'unemployment problem' (Burgess et al., 1998, p. 2; Quiggin, 2001, pp. 11-12). DEWRSB (1999) admitted as much when evaluating the "Work for the Dole" pilot program. Mutual Obligation policies continue to evolve as 'policy on the run'.

There has been considerable controversy surrounding Centrelink's interpretation of changing Government policy regarding breaching, particularly the application of more costly activity breach penalties in instances more suited to application of the less costly administrative breach penalties. This trend apparently developed

as a Centrelink response to toughened demands on job seekers, incorporated in the new Preparing for Work Agreements introduced by the Howard Government in July 2000 (ACOSS, 2001b, p. 8; MacDonald & Abello, 2001; McLeod, 2001).

A groundswell of opinion has created a political imperative for the Howard Government to review unemployment welfare policy relating to breaching. The release of the report; "Breaching the Safety Net" by ACOSS (2001b) generated sufficient pressure to prompt Minister Anthony to announce that Centrelink would examine its breaching practices to ensure efficacy and suitability (Anthony, 2001; Moscaritolo & Keim, 2001).

A Consortium of not-for-profit welfare organisations announced that it was inappropriate for Centrelink to review itself. The consortium commissioned an independent inquiry to review and report on breaches and penalties in the Centrelink system, chaired by Professor Dennis Pearce, an ex Commonwealth Ombudsman (ACOSS, 2001a; Horan, 2001; Raper, 2001). Demonstrating ongoing development of 'policy on the run', Minister Vanstone pre-empted the Pearce inquiry when announcing changes to Centrelink breaching practices, applicable from July 2002. The changes resulted from 26 Centrelink recommendations that arose from Minister Anthony's inquiry.

Minister Vanstone expressed satisfaction at being able to "look after our most vulnerable job seekers, while keeping the breaching regime tough for those who

deliberately try to cheat the system". The Minister agreed that the 'old' [still existing] system did have a problem, as it could be "too harsh on vulnerable people", (the deserving) who have a mental illness, are homeless, or are "with drug or alcohol problems" (Vanstone, 2002a, p. 1).

However the solution is likely to exacerbate the problem and create further breaching type hardship, because Minister Vanstone's focus remained on techniques for 'catching' non-genuine job seekers, who would now "face additional scrutiny" to ensure that "a robust mutual obligation system still exists" (Vanstone, 2002a, pp. 2-4).

From July 2002, Centrelink can suspend totally all payments, and then restore them, for people judged to be "at risk" of being breached. Unlike the current practice of reducing payments until a third breach, this stoppage of payment is intended to ensure that people must "come in for a face to face assessment" or stay 'off-benefit'. As Minister Vanstone put it; "an interview will be the last thing a cheater wants" (Vanstone, 2002a, pp. 2-4).

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Choosing a qualitative survey study.**

The primary research objective was to explore the lived experience of people who have received one or more breach penalties from Centrelink to see if their experiences matched the expectation and intent of the breaching policy as implemented by the Howard Coalition Government.

Time and resource limitations dictated that utilising extensive statistical or quantitative research techniques would not be a sensible use of available data. This is predominately because of the limited sample size that could realistically be collected and the fact that the responses gathered are essentially people's accounts of their individual perceptions of what has been happening to them (Burns, 1990, pp. 9-11).

Therefore a qualitative style of intensive survey questionnaire format was chosen. Neuman (1997) believed that a qualitative inductive study need not be greatly concerned with variables, reliability, statistics, hypotheses, replication or scales (p. 327). Burns (1990) discussed the complexity of human life when rejecting any need for quantitative numerical classifications, because such classifications would be unable to account for complexities which are the "determining factors to understand" when expanding behavioural knowledge (pp. 9-11).

Marshall and Rossman (1989) argued that the development process for conducting inductive qualitative research is difficult, without any data being initially available. However initial 'data' for this research and questionnaire construction existed, in the form of Government statements of intent regarding Mutual Obligation for unemployed welfare recipients and a wealth of studies about unemployment, income support, activity testing and breaching.

Neuman (1997) noted "researchers rarely know the specifics of data analysis when they begin a project", but considered that by "blending together empirical evidence and abstract concepts" in qualitative research, the researcher would be able to divide explanations into two categories: "highly unlikely and plausible" and be satisfied by "supplying supportive evidence" in the form of survey data (pp. 419-420).

Blaikie (1993) cited Popper's 'six point' steps of a deductive strategy for conducting qualitative research which closely resembles the research study documented herein. Beginning with framing a conjecture, that could form a 'theory', a conclusion could be deduced from the literature. Appropriate data is then gathered to test the conclusion. If the test fails; "data are not consistent... the 'theory' must be false". If the conclusion 'passes', that is data is consistent, the 'theory' is temporarily supported, thus "it is *corroborated*, not proved to be true" (p. 145, italics in original).

**Survey instrument design.**

(A copy of the complete survey form is attached at Appendix One).

Thirty-three questions were prepared. Four demographic questions, designed to identify gender, age grouping above or below 30 years and basic living arrangements within relationships, were included. Remaining questions were framed to elicit data about breaching experiences and outcomes for individual respondents. The questions were designed to reflect and test Government policy statements regarding objectives, intent and expectations. Neuman (1997) argued that “in qualitative research, ideas and evidence are mutually interdependent” for subsequent analysis (p. 421), as did Burns (1990, p. 252).

An anonymous format was used to guarantee confidentiality. Convention was followed to ensure that survey forms could be comprehensibly coded and held available for subsequent review by others (Babbie, 1995). The questions were designed to elicit responses indicative of respondent’s lived experiences. Questions asked about reasons, or lack of explanation, for breaches being given. There were questions about; perceived fairness; perceived pressures to leave welfare benefit programs; pressures to search harder for work; knowledge of (and use of) rights of appeal; receipt of notice of pending breach; increase or decrease of self-esteem; improved job prospects; greater or lesser intention to comply with Centrelink requirements and changes in desirability levels of individual accommodation.

The researcher understands the importance of retaining social meaning and need to identify the significance of that meaning by “remaining aware of the social context in which the research is being conducted” (Neuman, 1997, p. 331). Therefore, it was decided to include in the questionnaire some open-ended questions, offering space for respondents to express in writing *their* experiences in *their* words.

Ammon-Gaberson and Piantanida (1998) stressed the importance of logically developing survey questionnaires “in order to derive meaning from the data...” (p. 160). Babbie (1995) argued that validity is generally high in qualitative research because open-ended questions provide richness of insight that “clearly identifies concepts by giving detailed illustration” (p. 300), which also “measures what it purports to measure” (Neuman, 1997, p. 331).

Some questions were framed because the literature indicated that greater numbers of people were being breached (ACOSS, 2001b), and more people were receiving multiple breaches (Moses & Sharples, 2000). Further, the penalty cost to individuals was increasing, because Centrelink had reportedly changed its definitions of administrative breaches, thereby allowing more frequent applications of higher cost activity breaches (ACOSS, 2001b; Sleep, 2001).

Questions were also framed to facilitate data processing and second order analysis, to aid identification of similarities, dissimilarities and universals, and assist development of generalised understanding (Babbie, 1995).

### **Discussion on limitations of the research method.**

Some weaknesses of the survey approach used include the fact that the emphasis of the survey is on individuals who have been breached, and there is no control or comparison group. Thus the information cannot be generalised for use in a broader context, without further data collection. Wider collection could have enabled a more thorough evaluation of any resulting implications, with possibly more telling conclusions (Caulley, 1992). The results obtained suggest that this is an area that would justify further research, particularly in ascertaining what happens to people who are breached, compared with those who are not.

The small survey sample size cannot justify sophisticated statistical analysis. Indeed, there could be danger that if extensive statistical analysis were applied to answers from the questionnaire, in an effort to claim 'scientific/statistical' specificity, such effort would not provide greater accuracy beyond what was measured, which was the respondent's answers to specific survey questions.

Additionally, the same answer by more than one person to the same question may not be an indicator of *identical* lived experience, because people experience

differential emotions and outcomes to similar trauma. Merton (1936) believed such experiences are always “different” (p. 899). Differential experience is further complicated by the fact that language used to express ‘lived experience’ may, although the words used are the same, still have different meaning for different respondents (Babbie, 1995; Burns, 1990; Neuman, 1997).

Survey respondents overwhelmingly represented continuing customers of Centrelink. The choice of survey locations was unlikely to attract large numbers of people who had been breached, but were no longer Centrelink customers. However the use of a standard survey form, collected from three separate locations, does assist reliability and validity. Hammersley (1992) considered reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers (respondents) on different occasions.

Hammersley (1990) believed that validity meant truth, interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers. The survey form was developed by the researcher to explore individual respondent reactions to breaching phenomena described in the literature, in a consistent format. Survey results evidenced a ‘degree of consistency’. However it was noticeable that in the reportedly less affluent area in which Nundah Centrelink office is located (Wilson, 2002), respondents appeared to be breached more often, with higher penalty costs, and they were more likely to have less

desirable accommodation after being breached. These results will be considered further in Chapters Five and Six.

Hall (1998) discussed issues of reliability and validity in his research on the Work for the Dole program, citing Chadwick, Bahr and Albrecht's 1984 comments about survey participants. When participants are regarded as taking part in a "socially disapproved activity" of being unemployed, data collected in this type of survey situation "has the propensity to elicit purposeful misinformation". This is because "the unemployed are aware of mandatory requirements and government surveillance" (p. 22). However, it is expected that data collected in this survey and study reflects reasonable accuracy, with minimum 'protest' type misinformation, because the researcher presented in a non-protest-like manner.

The researcher presented as a middle aged, middle class, conservatively dressed Caucasian male. The survey presentation incorporated a well-designed questionnaire, on University letterhead, which explained purpose and professional signage, as recommended by (Neuman, 1997, Chapter 14). (Copies of the materials appear at Appendices One and Two). In the event, more than 100 people apparently felt non-threatened, as they eagerly approached the researcher asking "where do I sign?". Presumably they wished to 'add their vote' against disliked Centrelink practices.

To further enhance reliability and validity for this study, several other independent studies will be compared and contrasted in Chapters Four and Five. Marshall and Rossman (1989) recommended a strategic research choice to enhance generaliseability of a study by utilising “triangulation”, defined as “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (p. 146). Burns (1990) also argued the usefulness of triangulation, when applying different data sets to confirm and build internal validation. The literature review uncovered data on the prevalence and severity of breaching, that can be triangulated. See (ACOSS, 2001b; Moses & Sharples, 2000; Pearce et al., 2002; Sleep, 2001).

#### **Data collection procedure.**

Data collection took place on five days, within a three-week period of April, 2002. The researcher took up a position on the public footpath directly in front of three Centrelink offices. Two days were spent at the Mitchelton branch, two days at Chermside, and one day at Nundah. The branches are located in the ‘northern’ areas of urban Brisbane. They were selected because their locations were convenient. Consideration was given to surveying other Brisbane Centrelink offices, particularly those located in areas publicly labeled as having greater socio-economic disadvantage, with possibly higher incidences of breaching. However, the research purpose was to study how the lives of those breached were affected, not the phenomena or volume of breaching incidents. Babbie (1995) reminded researchers to remain focused on their purpose (pp. 102-103).

Members of the public in the vicinity of the selected Centrelink offices were considered to be potential respondents. They could see two large (size A1) signs presented at a small table attended by the researcher. (A copy of the signs appears at Appendix Two). The signs invited participation in a survey if people “have been breached by Centrelink”. When people approached the researcher, they were advised that only those aged 18 years and over, who had received at least one breach from Centrelink, would be eligible to complete a ‘tick the box type’ survey about their experience. No spruiking activities or financial inducements were made. After people had voluntarily chosen to participate, and completed the survey form, they were offered a ‘mintie’ by the researcher, from an open packet laying on the table, and thanked.

### **Initial data collection and field observation.**

As noted, more than 100 people approached the researcher as a result of the signage. Most of them expressed dissatisfaction and anger toward Centrelink practices, most commonly with the complaint that Centrelink “just don’t listen” to them. This comment ‘fits’ with literature reports of Centrelink not being fair and not giving the benefit of the doubt, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Fifty-six individuals qualified the criteria of age and having been breached, and completed the survey. The standard questionnaire format increased

comparability of data, because all respondents had the same response sequence and opportunity, mostly without input from the researcher. (In 5 or 6 instances, the researcher was asked for assistance, interpretation or clarification). The large majority completed the survey independently.

The independent ability of respondents to complete the survey form was reflected in the writing and spelling standard of responses. They were of higher standard than anticipated during questionnaire design. Possibly the method of recruiting people, using written signs without spruiking, pre-ordained that only reasonably fluent readers would volunteer to participate.

The observations noted above, fit with the idea that this study is also a form of field research. The researcher has met the survey respondents, liased with various authorities and conducted correspondence, meetings and discussions with a variety of Centrelink Managers. It is appropriate that this 'field data' is included in this study. Babbie (1995) argued that "one of the key strengths of field research is the comprehensiveness of perspective it gives the researcher" (p. 280). See also (Ammon-Gaberson & Piantanida, 1998; Burns, 1990; Neuman, 1997; Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1996).

For example, some comments made by various Centrelink managers appeared, to this researcher, to exhibit attitudinal thinking reflecting the ideological rhetoric of the Howard Government. Some of this 'thinking' has been reported (and

inferred) from the literature review presented in this study. As a practical and ethical consideration, the researcher also wrote to the Chief Executive Officer of Centrelink, advising of the proposed survey activity. (See copy at Appendix Four). No response had been received during the conduct of the survey, however Centrelink (Canberra) eventually advised by letter that their Brisbane Area Manager had been notified.

At the first survey location, Mitchelton, it was apparent to the researcher that Centrelink staff had not been alerted to the survey activity. Staff appeared at doorways and windows, exhibiting obvious interest, curiosity and concern. An Acting Manager approached the researcher after twenty minutes. She perused proffered documentation, ethical clearance and University approvals, then appeared to relax slightly when commenting that “no one else was game to approach you”. Accepting a copy of the survey instrument, she advised the Commonwealth had ‘move on’ power, and a senior manager from Brisbane office was “coming out” to see the researcher.

In due course the Business Manager, Area Brisbane, approached in a non-confrontational manner. Clearly she had perused the survey instrument, and had received a briefing from the Acting Manager. Her major concerns were that there should be no placards, protests or press gatherings. She stated her initial report indicated there was protest activity involving placards taking place, and

expressed surprise that upon arrival, she saw “only one individual, standing at a small table under a tree, like at those polling booths”.

The misunderstandings and concerns exhibited by Centrelink personnel in communications with the researcher suggest an elevated level of awareness and understanding by Centrelink staff exists about breaching policies. Staff apparently understand Mutual Obligation activities are controversial, are resented by Centrelink customers and are subject to ‘outside’ scrutiny. Concern was expressed that public protest activity could readily erupt, creating “political problems” for Centrelink. The Business Manager asked the researcher to give notice to other Centrelink Branches to be visited, and provided names and direct telephone numbers to facilitate this notice.

Consequently Centrelink Managers at Chermside and Nundah were forewarned of the survey. Some comments made to the researcher by Centrelink managers are included here, as a part of the study, highlighting expressed managerial attitudes. For example, telephone communication with the Chermside Manager was co-operative, as she had been expecting the call. Nevertheless, she expressed concern about what form the survey might take, as “this Centrelink office is one of multiple tenancies in this complex, and a very *unpopular* one, because of the *nature of our clients*, as you would understand”.

The 'nature of our clients' was taken by the researcher to mean unpleasant, deviant people of low social standing and acceptability. However this research study was not designed to follow Babbie's (1995) suggestion that "often, careful examination of deviant cases in field research can yield important insights into *normal* patterns of social behaviour (p. 303, italics in original).

When telephoned, the Nundah Branch Manager confirmed to the researcher that she was aware of the pending survey. Canberra had directed, via Queensland Management, that this survey was in progress. The researcher's name had been disseminated and an instruction had been issued that the survey should proceed, provided compliance with Centrelink's national guidelines for the management of 'customer behavior' was maintained during the survey. Tellingly, this researcher was described as "benign and friendly".

### **Ethical considerations.**

Due to the public nature of the intended method of attracting potential respondents for the survey, the researcher visited the local regional headquarters of the Queensland Police Service and the local Ward Office of Brisbane City Council, to ascertain that the collection method proposed would be lawful. (File-note recording visits attached at Appendix Three). As previously mentioned, the Centrelink Chief Executive Officer was advised by letter of the proposed survey. (See Appendix Four).

A completed Check-list for Human Research activity, including signed approvals from the Head of School of Humanities and Human Services and the Study Supervisor, was submitted to the Secretary of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC). The Secretary confirmed exemption from full ethical clearance and authorised immediate commencement of the research electronically. (The E-mail appears at Appendix Five). In order to clarify the methodology of this study further, the complete survey response tallies, with comment, follows in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SURVEY RESPONSE TALLIES

### **Initial survey response tallies and comment.**

The findings of the survey will be presented in Chapter Five. What follows here is representative information drawn from the initial tallies of responses to the 33 survey questions, in sequence, that were given in the 56 completed questionnaires, together with some preliminary findings from secondary analysis of data. Data was processed in an Excel computer program, which facilitated comparison, interrogation, extrapolation and production of illustrative graphics included herein. (The complete survey form appears at Appendix One).

**1: Are you aged 18 years or older? 100%**, all 56 people responded 'Yes'.

**2: Have you ever been breached by Centrelink? 100%** ticked 'Yes' (56).

**3: Are you under 30 years old? 54%** reported 'Yes' (30) and **46%** 'No' (26).

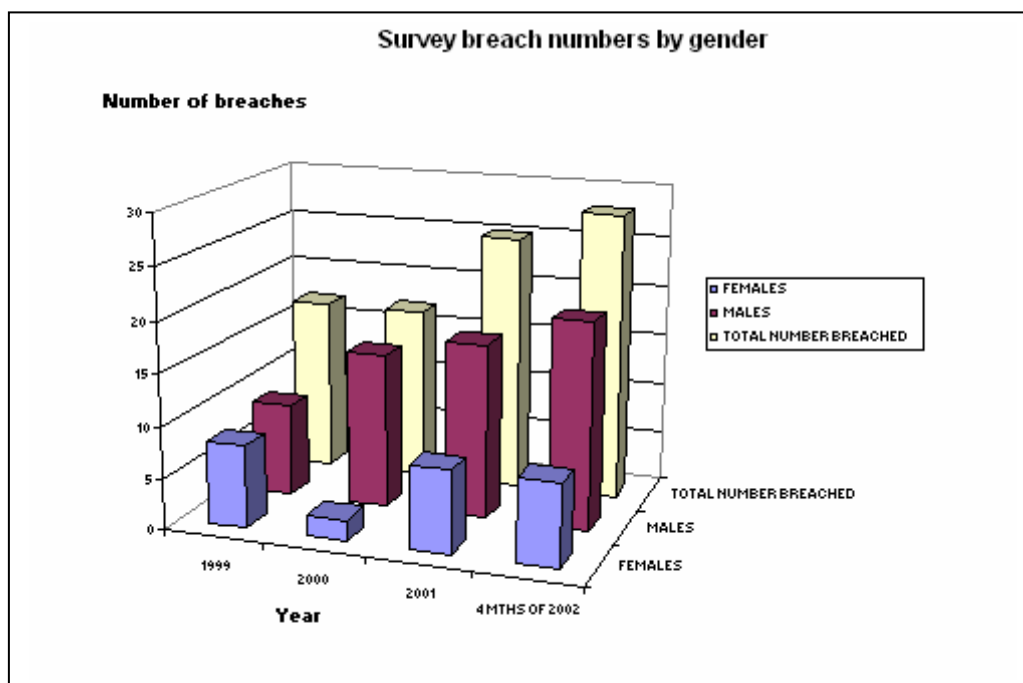
**4: Are you male or female? 71%** reported Male (40) and **29%** Female (16).

7 females reported being aged under 30 compared with 23 males.

*It was expected that young males would be represented more often than other groups, because activity tests subject to Mutual Obligation were initially targeted at young people (Richardson, 2000). Young people continue to be targeted for*

*special treatment by Government (Dullroy, 2002), and young males appear to be breached more often than other people, within a shorter period of benefit receipt (Moses & Sharples, 2000).*

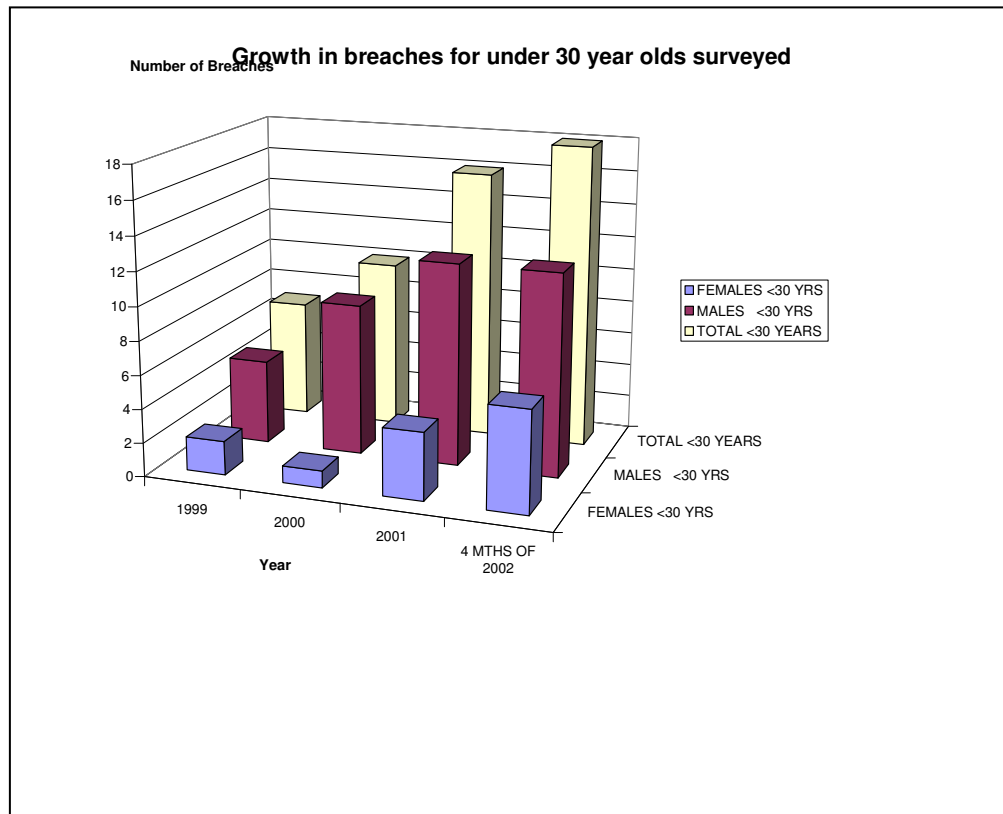
**Figure 1: Survey breach numbers by gender.**



A breakdown of age and gender response, indicated that in 1999, of 17 people breached, 7 were under 30 and 5 of those were male. In 2000, of 17 people breached, 10 were under 30 and 9 of those were male. In 2001, of 25 people breached, 16 were under 30 and 12 of those were male. In the first four months of 2002, 28 people indicated that they had been breached in that year, and of those, 18 were under 30 and of the 18, there were 12 males.

*This study survey triangulated well with breach figures reported by Moses and Sharples (2000, p.17) and Richardson (2000) who found younger people, particularly males, are much more likely to be breached than older people.*

**Figure 2: Includes representation of 4 months of 2002 right column.**



*A factor that could contribute to this result is the 'recentness' of the breach. Resentment against being breached may tend to diminish over time, (not unlike remembering parking tickets) so that those more recently breached may have had greater likelihood of approaching the researcher to be included.*

**5: How would you best describe your living arrangements?**

**25%** were 'single, living alone' (14). **28%** were 'single, sharing group house' (16). **14%** were 'living with partner' (7). **11%** were 'living with partner and

children' (6). **11%** were 'Single with children' (6) and **11%** reported 'other arrangements' (6).

*Approximately **64%** were "single", representing 36 individuals out of 56.*

### **6: When you were breached, what Centrelink payment were you getting?**

Several people indicated receipt of more than one payment. 37 people received 'Newstart', 11 received 'Youth Allowance', eight received 'Parenting Payment' and one received 'Partner Allowance'. Three people received 'Disability Support Pension', one received 'Austudy' and two received 'Carer Pension'.

*Newstart was nominated three times more often than any other program. **89%** of respondents (50) were in programs subject to activity tests.*

### **7: How long were you on that payment before getting breached?**

18 people reported being breached at 1 - 6 months. 18 reported at 7-12 months.

9 reported being breached after 1 year and 11 people after more than 2 years.

**64%** respondents (36) reported that they were breached whilst on a benefit for less than one year, compared with 36% people (20) who were breached after one year. Secondary analysis showed that in 1999, eight respondents received a

breach within one year. In 2000 there were 11, in 2001 there were 15 and in the elapsed four months of 2002, there were 23 people.

*The number breached within one year tend to corroborate reported breach rates being increasingly applied earlier within benefit programs (ACOSS, 2001b; Pearce et al., 2002; Sleep, 2001).*

### **8: What is your main activity currently?**

Several respondents indicated more than one activity, rendering percentages meaningless. Nine people were in 'Part Time Work', thirty-four were 'Looking for work', eight were 'Studying', nine indicated 'Home Duties', none were 'Retired' and eight selected 'Other'.

### **9: In which years were you breached?**

Many respondents indicated multiple years, 17 people indicated 1999, 17 indicated 2000, 25 indicated 2001 and 28 indicated the first four months of 2002.

*This response corroborates the observation, derived from the literature, that there is now increased Government pressure upon Centrelink and the Job Network to increase frequency levels of breaching. The pressure is partly based*

*on the belief that increased sanctions will discourage 'welfare dependency' (Newman, 2000).*

**10: How many times have you been breached in the last 4 years?**

**46%** of respondents (26) indicated 'Once'. **28%** or (16) indicated 'Twice'. **13%** or (7) indicated '3 Times' and **13%**, or (7) indicated 'More than 3 Times'.

*56%, more than half, had had more than one breach, which will be discussed.*

**11: If you have had what Centrelink calls an Administrative Breach, please tick the box showing number of times:**

'Once' was indicated 27 times, 'Twice' 9 times and 'More than Twice' 7 times.

**12: If you have had what Centrelink calls an Activity Breach, please tick the box showing number of times:**

'Once' was indicated 20 times, 'Twice' 12 times and 'Three times or more' received 3 indications.

*The answers to questions 11 and 12 probably reflect respondent confusion about breach type, as they unexpectedly record some 66 administrative breaches compared with 54 activity breaches. This apparent difference between responses*

*to types of breaches in this survey is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, pp.73-75 where it is established that the majority of breaches were activity breaches as would be expected (Sleep, 2001, p.6).*

*At first sight the answers to questions 11 and 12 were worrying because if the answers regarding the type of breach 'as named' were accurate, then this suggested that these 56 survey respondents were somehow different to the entire breached population. As reported in the literature, more activity breaches than administrative breaches are issued (ACOSS, 2001b, p.5; Moses & Sharples, 2000, p. 8).*

**13: What were the penalty or penalties that you received?**

Twelve people reported a breach resulting in 'Nil payment for two weeks', ten reported a breach resulting in '16% reduction for 13 weeks'. 21 people received an '18% reduction for 26 weeks, 14 had a '24% reduction for 26 weeks'. Eight reported "Nil payment for 8 weeks' and eight people indicated a different breach penalty.

*As mentioned at Question 12, some respondents appeared not know what their breach penalties were, or simply responded to the first category choice offered, which was administrative breach. A secondary analysis of Question 13 answers is illustrated in Chapter Five, page 74.*

**14: Did Centrelink give you any reasons why they gave you a penalty breach?**

73% responded by indicating 'Yes' (41), 16% indicated 'No' (9) and 11% or six people 'Don't know'.

**15: If you answered Yes, do you remember any reasons Centrelink gave you?**

An 'open' question; 42 written responses were recorded. Several people recorded multiple reasons. Category type summaries were developed for the written answers and the summary response counts follow:

Moved to area with fewer jobs (1). Wrong advice given by Centrelink (4). Failed to attend Job Network as required (4). Failed to comply with Activity Agreement (4). No mail or advice was received (5). Employer Certificate forms not satisfactorily completed (5). Failed to return form on time (6). Income declaration was unsatisfactory together with overpayment reclaim problems (6). Failed to complete Job Diary satisfactorily (6). Failed to attend scheduled Centrelink interview (7).

*The above categories differ slightly to those used by ACOSS (2001b, p.8) and Moses and Sharples (2000, p.8), however overall triangulation of the results produced similar results across the studies.*

**16: When you got breached, did you think that Centrelink was being fair to you?**

95% or 53 people indicated that Centrelink was **not being fair**. 3% (2) indicated 'Yes' and one indicated 'Don't know'.

**17: Do you feel that Centrelink puts you under pressure to make you go off benefits permanently?**

79% responded 'Yes' (44 people), 9% responded 'No', (5) and a further 12% or (7) responded 'Don't know'.

**18: Did you realise that you could appeal against Centrelink's decision to give you a breach penalty?**

52% or 29 people responded 'Yes'. 43% 'No' (24) and 5% 'Don't know' (3).

**19: Did you appeal your breach penalty decision to Centrelink?**

39% responded 'Yes' (22 people), 56% or (31) reported 'No'. 5% or (3) reported 'Don't know'.

**20: If you appealed, was your appeal successful?**

Nine people indicated 'Yes', 15 indicated 'No' and 5 indicated 'Don't know'.

**21: If you appealed, how long did your appeal process take?**

Fourteen respondents indicated the appeal process took weeks, ranging from one week to seven, averaging approximately three weeks. Eight respondents indicated the process took months. One respondent reported an unlikely 24 months, another 15 months. Disregarding these two extended periods, an average appeal wait-time of approximately 6 weeks. However, when including the two longer time respondents mentioned, an average appeal process time of just over 11 weeks is calculated for all survey respondents, which does not appear "highly unlikely" as defined by (Neuman, 1997, pp.419-420).

*The tallies at Question 20 and 21 do not appear to 'gel' with the number who said they 'appealed'. It may be that some appeals were still proceeding and other respondents were confused about their queries as opposed to an actual appeal. The appeal process is very complex (some respondents expressed the uselessness of attempting it) which may have added to the apparent confusion recorded.*

**22: If your breaches meant that Centrelink stopped all benefit payments to you, how long was it before you re-applied to Centrelink for another benefit?**

Fourteen people indicated periods of weeks, the average delay representing approximately five weeks. The range ran from two to 16 weeks. Two respondents reported three and four months respectively, therefore averaging approximately 15 weeks between them. However of the 16 respondents, only 12 *actually* reported a **complete** loss of benefit, and their average time waited before reapplying was 6.5 weeks.

*Without alternative income, this time period represents considerable hardship (McLeod, 2001). Interestingly, only two of the twelve people above who had all benefit stopped, reported needing to leave their accommodation for less desirable accommodation at Question 32. Of these twelve, six were under thirty years of age and six were over thirty, eight were male and four were female. As will be seen, many respondents needed to move into less desirable accommodation, because their benefit payment was **reduced**, not because it was stopped.*

**23: Did you expect to get breached before the penalty was actually given to you by Centrelink? (Did you see it coming?)**

**91%**, (51 respondents) indicated 'No'. **5%** or (3) indicated 'Yes' and **4%** or (2) 'Didn't know'.

Question 23 carried an "Any Comment?" section. 14 written responses were recorded, including two from the three people indicating 'expecting a breach'.

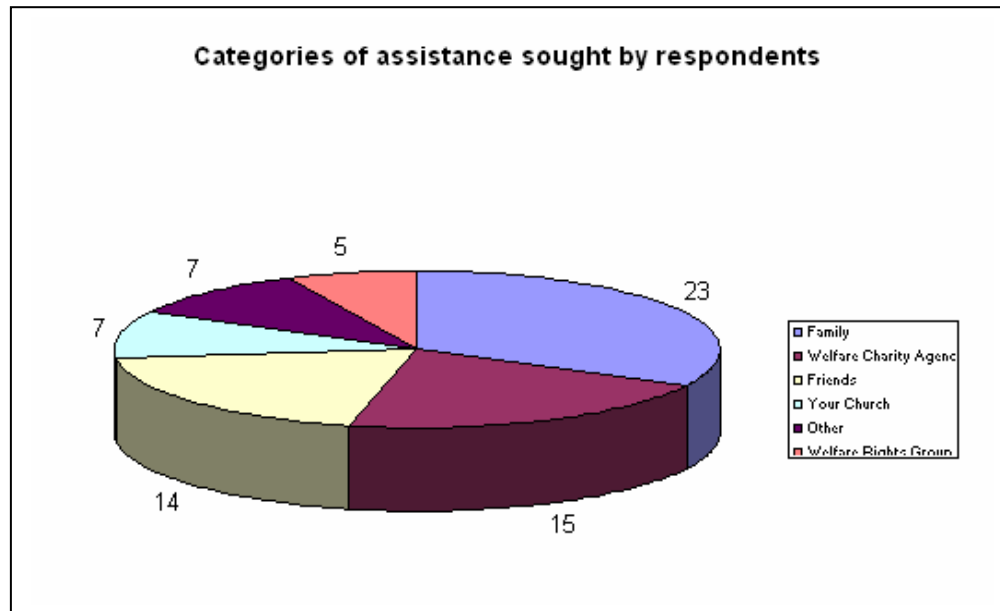
(One knew a document was unavailable, the other believed he was being 'targeted'). Responses from the 12 people who did not expect a breach included three who believed Centrelink was mistaken. Three people reported receiving no advice, but their payment was changed. Three people believed their forms were completed satisfactorily. Two reported receiving no warning or 'clue'. One person was unhappy with a Job Network agency's unhelpful 'dobbing' to Centrelink.

**24: After you received a breach penalty, did you get any help from others?**

Multiple responses included 23 people indicating 'Family', 14 'Friends' and 5 indicated 'Welfare Rights Group'. 7 nominated 'Your Church', 15 'Welfare Charity Agency' and 7 indicated 'Other'.

*Family was the highest called upon 'help' category, 39% of all respondents (22 people) of whom 15 were under thirty years of age. The call on 'charity' appears to be increasing. 'Charity' recorded 6 indications in 1999, 2000 and 2001. However in the elapsed 4 months of 2002, eight people indicated needing charity, tending to corroborate the growing numbers reported by welfare organisations (ACOSS, 2001b; Nevile, 2001). See figure 3 below and Chapter Five.*

**Figure 3: Categories of assistance sought by respondents.**



**25: Do you think the threat of a breach penalty made you look harder for a job?**

**34%** of people responded 'Yes' (19), **57%** 'No' (32) and **9%** 'Didn't know' (5).

Question 25 also provided space for written comment; 22 written comments were recorded, none came from the five people who indicated 'Don't know' at this question. Seven comments were from respondents who had indicated 'Yes', including four who reported "no money - to look for jobs", two implied willingness to do 'anything' to get money (one of these wrote "yes, went out and sold drugs"). Another was motivated "to get away from incompetent [Centrelink] people".

There were 15 comments from people indicating 'No'. Of these; four people reported looking for work or working part time "anyway", three were full time students, three used vernacular to indicate 'made angry'. Two people had 'no money to look for work', two people wrote of diminished motivation; "I am 63 years old" and "made my worthlessness and motivation worse" and another wrote; "bad back can't work".

**26: Has Centrelink given you a compulsory activity under their Mutual Obligation rules, such as "Work for the Dole" or a course of study?**

41% people responded 'Yes' (23), 52% 'No' (29), and 7% 'Didn't know' (4).

**27: If you answered Yes, what were you compelled to do?**

Question 27 provided for an open-ended written response. 21 responses were received, the compulsory activities were categorised as follows:

Instructed to attend interview (2). Instructed to attend study course (3). Given Intensive Assistance Program (5). Given Work for the Dole program (6). Given Job Search Training Program (4). Instructed to attend volunteer work (1).

**28: Have you signed a "Preparing for Work Agreement" with Centrelink?**

64% of respondents noted 'Yes' (36), 32% indicated 'No' (18), and 4% or two people 'Didn't know'.

**29: Do you think that any activity Centrelink has made you do has meant that you have become more likely to get paid work?**

7% responded 'Yes' (4), contrasting with 73% of 'No' responses (41) and 20% of 'Don't know' (11).

*This is in line with the literature, to be discussed in Chapter Five following.*

**30: When you received a breach penalty, was your self-esteem increased or decreased?**

Fully 93% of respondents (52 people) believed their self-esteem had *decreased*. 5% were uncertain (3) and 2% or one person indicated increased self-esteem

**31: Did getting a breach penalty help you avoid being breached again?**

18% indicated 'Yes' (10 people), 62% indicated 'No' (35), 20% chose 'Don't know' (11).

*The majority of respondents did not think the experience of being breached helped them to avoid further breaches. This has congruence with survey responses at Question 10, (more than half received multiple breaches) and the literature, and will be discussed in Chapter Five.*

**32: After you were breached, did you stay in your existing residence?**

77% of people (43), reported staying in their accommodation, three of these wrote an extra comment implying 'just managed'. However a surprising 23% of

respondents, 13 individuals, reported being unable to remain in their existing accommodation after being breached.

**33: If you answered No, did you shift into:**

- a) Equally desirable accommodation?                      One person responded 'Yes'.
- b) Less desirable accommodation?                              Twelve people responded 'Yes'
- c) Some other accommodation?

There were six written responses at part C: Three people wrote "on Streets", one wrote "St Vincent de Paul Men's Homeless Shelter" and two people moved to less desirable accommodation. Of the 12 people who found they needed to move into less desirable accommodation, only one was female, aged under thirty years. Of the 11 remaining males, nine were aged under thirty years.

*A consequence of being breached is that accommodation standards can be reduced, and this impacts more often on younger males, as has been noted in the literature (ACOSS, 2001b; Pearce et al., 2002) and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.*

From the initial response tallies, a few percentage figures stood out:

**95%** of respondents (53 people) thought that, when breached, Centrelink was being unfair. **93%** of respondents (52) felt that their self-esteem had decreased after being breached. **91%** of respondents (51) did not realise beforehand, that

they were about to be breached and **89%** of respondents (50 people) were in benefit programs involving activity tests.

**Table 2: Analysis of gender and age across breaches from respondents.**

YEAR	TOTAL NO PEOPLE BREACHED	MALES	FEMALES	AGE < 30 YEARS	AGE >30 YEARS	TOTAL NO OF BREACHES	LEAS THAN ONE YEAR	MORE THAN ONE YEAR
1999	17	9	8	7	10	22	8	9
2000	17	15	2	10	7	27	11	6
2001	25	17	8	16	9	37	16	9
4MTH OF 2002	28	20	8	18	10	40	23	5

From the above table of survey responses, increases may be seen in most categories for the four months of 2002, with more males aged under thirty years reporting more breaches within one year of starting on benefit. These increases will be discussed further in Chapter Five, which follows.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SURVEY FINDINGS

At the outset it needs to be understood that references to '*this survey*' or '*this study*' mean the survey data collected and previously outlined in the methodology and survey response tally chapters of this thesis. For clarity the two terms will be italicised or underlined as appropriate. As previously stated, the study seeks to examine whether the lived experiences of the survey respondents matched the *expectation* and *intent* of Centrelink's breaching practices, as applied under the Mutual Obligation policy of the Howard Government.

The literature review and data derived from Government policy publications facilitated preparation of the questionnaire instrument for *this survey* and construction of some hypotheses that could be questioned. However, it remains important to reiterate that the findings of *this study* reflect what happened to the 56 survey respondents when they were breached. Such findings, on their own, do not establish that being breached causes these things to happen to people.

### **Findings on Government expectations regarding breaching policy.**

In developing breaching policies, the Government appeared to make some assumptions that led it to have *expectations* about the effect of breaching penalties when applied to unemployed welfare recipients. Those expectations may have been unfounded. For example, the Government *expected* that people

who received a breach penalty would be motivated to 'comply' with activity tests and thus avoid further breaches.

In 1997 the Government stated in Parliament that the Mutual Obligation breaching regime was expected "to maintain a strong deterrence for failure to meet reasonable requirements" (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p.4). See also (Centrelink, 2001a). As the Commonwealth Productivity Commission has put it; "a breaching regime is an important part of ensuring that unemployment beneficiaries seriously engage in job search or measures that improve their employability" (CPC, 2002, Sect. 6, p.17).

*This study indicated that some 62 per cent of respondents (35) indicated at Question 31 that getting a breach penalty **was of no help to them in avoiding further breach penalties**, and 20 per cent (11) indicated uncertainty as to any avoidance effect.*

The Government *expected* that one breach would be sufficient to deter people from being breached again (DEWRSB, 2001, p. 11), due to the sliding scale of increasing penalties for subsequent failures to comply with activity requirements. See also (ACOSS, 2001b, p.3; Burgess et al., 2000; Moses & Sharples, 2000).

*However at Question 10, more than half of the respondents to this study, almost **56%** or 31 people reported that they **had been breached more than once**. This*

*was congruent with the majority of respondents to this study reporting (at Question 31) that being breached once was of **no** help in avoiding further breaches.*

The Government also *expected* that compelling individuals to engage in Mutual Obligation type job search related activities would be accepted by unemployment benefit recipients. Beneficiaries would recognise the useful and practical aids provided to assist their job search, and participation would become a normal part of 'reasonable' job-seeker responsibilities (DEWRSB, 2001; Howard, 1999; Lauritsen, 2001; Moses & Sharples, 2000; Newman, 2000).

*However this survey found, at Question 29, that 73% of respondents, 41 out of 56 people, believed that **they were not more likely to get paid work because of any Centrelink compulsory activity undertaken.***

This response is not surprising. The Commonwealth Productivity Commission's Draft Report noted that only 10% of unemployed people were more likely to get work as a result of participating in the Intensive Assistance Program (CPC, 2002). DEWSRB's (2000) evaluation of the Work for the Dole Program found that after five months fewer than 10% of participants were 'off-benefit' and presumed to be employed (p.5).

The Government also *expected* that a breaching regime built around activity test compliance and the ideology of Mutual Obligation would be politically popular. The Government had set about ensuring that society generally understood and agreed with the politically popular slogan that there was “no free ride” in welfare, and if the community (as taxpayer) was to provide support, something needed to be given back by welfare recipients (Anthony, 2000; Brough, 2001; Howard, 1999; Jackman, 2002; Newman, 2000; Vanstone & Abbott, 2001).

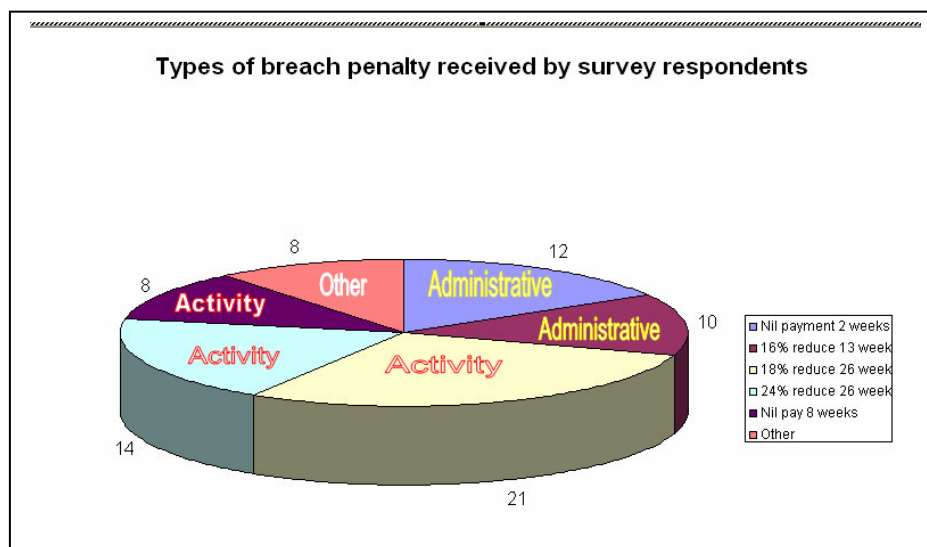
‘Giving something back’ was seen as a political imperative to keep the community accepting of the unemployment welfare program, because of the well cultivated and popular belief in the existence of the ‘dole bludger’ frame of thinking (Brough, 2001; Parnell, 2002). The *expectation* of Mutual Obligation included “a need to make it harder for people to choose welfare over work” which had Prime Minister Howard and Minister Newman promulgating “tough love” (McKenna, 1999, p. 11).

Reminiscent of the 1976 Fraser Government’s non-legislative “act of State repression” when it instructed Social Security field officers to increase activity against “unworthy” unemployment claimants (Windschuttle, 1980, pp. 218-219). The Howard Government also changed the rules for administrative and activity breaches, increased Mutual Obligation requirements and instructed Centrelink to increase compliance surveillance activity as a deterrent to claimants (ACOSS, 2001b, p. 2; Burgess et al., 2000; Pearce et al., 2002; Sleep, 2001).

The Government also pressured publicly funded Job Network agencies, contractually requiring them to increase the number of breach recommendations to be forwarded to Centrelink (ACOSS, 2001a, p. 8; DEWRSB, 2001, p. 10; Hannon, 2002, p.5; McLeod, 2001). Consequently Anglicare Australia noted “penalties have come to dominate the entire system” (Nevile, 2001, p. 3).

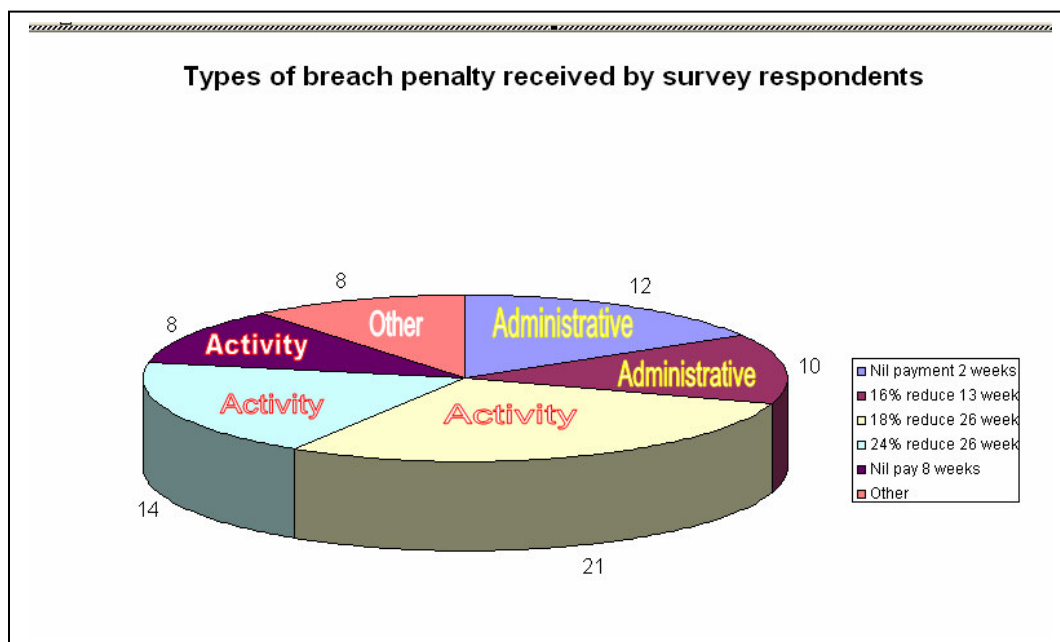
*As mentioned in Chapter Four, increased levels of breaching were reflected in the experiences of the survey respondents to this study, however respondents did not report receiving greater numbers of activity breaches, compared with administrative breaches by name, as expected (Moses & Sharples, 2000). Sleep (2001) had found that activity breaches were almost double those of administrative breaches issued in 1999-2000 (p. 6). Initial responses to this survey summed to 54 activity breaches and 66 administrative breaches.*

**Figure 4: Reported administration versus activity breaches for *this survey*.**



An explanation may lie in the following Figure 5, below. When actual breach penalties which respondents to *this survey* reported were given a secondary analysis by breach type, compared with the result obtained when respondents 'named' their penalty, these responses now showed a reversal of the figures. Activity breaches reported in this manner exceed the number of administrative breaches reported. This analysis is possible because the breach penalties issued differed in value and duration between administrative and activity categories. This was the more expected result, in line with the literature.

**Figure 5: Types of breach penalty received by respondents to *this survey*.**



*To further clarify the initial ambiguity between the number of breaches reported by 'name' when compared with the number reported by 'type' in this survey, a triangulation was made. Comparing ACOSS' (2001b, p. 9) findings that between September 2000 and February 2001 incidences of breaching were increasing, and 14 per cent of their respondents had been breached a third time. A third breach penalty means an activity breach that cuts all payment for 8 weeks. The ACOSS third breach figure co-relates closely with the findings of this survey, as 14 per cent of respondents also indicated activity breaches at the third level.*

*The finding illustrated at Figure 5 actually strengthens the representative nature and reliability of the responses reported in this study.*

### **Findings on Government intent regarding breaching policy.**

In the previous section some expectations of government were outlined. It may also be said that the government *expected* that not all unemployment beneficiaries would view Mutual Obligations "favourably". Therefore "further compliance measures" would be required (Burgess et al., 1998, p. 13). The intensification of activity tests and the breaching regime thus developed as Government policy and *intent*.

On coming to office in 1996, the Howard Government took steps to increase the frequency and cost impost of breach penalties (Moses & Sharples, 2000, p. 11;

Pearce et al., 2002). The *intent* appeared to be based on a belief that people who were breached would be more likely to increase efforts, with urgency, to find paid work and move 'off-benefit'. Another assumption made was that people were not trying hard enough to find work, and as 'non-genuine' job seekers, therefore needed "coercive authority" (Kinnear, 2000, p.10; Edwards et al., 2001; Moses & Sharples, 2000. p. 16).

Various Ministers assumed tougher penalties would "flush out dole cheats" (Odgers, 2001; Vanstone, 2002b). Deputy Prime Minister Anderson stated that people accepting dole payments but not looking hard enough for work were "deliberately shirking work...not the Australian way" (Parnell, 2002, p. 2).

*However, at Question 25 of this survey, which asked respondents if they thought threats of a breach penalty would make them look harder for work, 57 percent (32 people out of 56) responded 'No' and a further 9 per cent or 5 people indicated 'don't know'. **The majority of people did not think that they needed to look for work harder or more urgently, under threat of a breach.** Five respondents specifically wrote they were already looking 'as hard as they could'.*

The literature supports the assertion that most people want to work and actively look for it (ACOSS, 2001a, p.5; Goodin, 2001, pp.196-197; Quiggin, 2001). However the Government *intended* that unemployed people should look even 'harder' for work. Increasing obligations and penalties were previously noted,

see Burgess et al. (2000). The Government openly discussed the changes, using 'dole bludger' rhetoric, because its *intent* was to create pressure on unemployed people to move 'off-benefit' (Moses & Sharples, 2000; Richardson, 2000).

Government *intent* also included notions of 'sustainable fiscal management' (Newman, 2000) and the perceived political imperative of providing "tough love" treatment to people who are "welfare dependant" (McKenna, 1999). Some beneficiaries were thought not to be seeking work hard enough, despite current high unemployment levels, so that in the words of Minister Brough they are "deservedly" called "dole bludgers" (Atkins, 2002, p.1). Also see (Bryson, 1993; Titmuss, 2000).

The researcher's observations during *this study*, included viewing of physical service arrangements provided at the Centrelink reception counters visited. It appeared unemployment customers were being treated with a lesser quality of service, because only two staff had been assigned to serve long queues of customers waiting in carefully designated areas. This contrasted with up to four staff positioned to attend to generally fewer customers in the Age and Disability Pension area. (Pensioner customers are permitted to mail their documents into Centrelink, unlike unemployment beneficiaries who must hand deliver them).

Disgruntled comments made by people waiting in the unemployment section queues confirmed they felt undeserving, and that deliberate hindrance and

deterrence was being applied to them. See also MacDonald & Abello (2001, p.3) on “increased pressures” and Tomlinson (2001, pp. 7-10) on “harassment”.

*At question 17 of this study the majority of respondents indicated that they felt that Centrelink put them under pressure to go ‘off-benefit’ permanently. 79%, or 44 people responded in this way. Thus Government **intent**, as expressed through Centrelink and Job Network processes, appears corroborated.*

Corroborating the literature and *this survey*, the Government’s *intent* in its treatment of unemployment beneficiaries as part of a politically perceived ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ binary divide that has historically been applied to people in receipt of charity or welfare. The Government’s *intent* is to provide a ‘safety net’ only for those considered ‘worthy’. Therefore, it seeks to ensure that those considered ‘unworthy’ should have their self esteem attacked, to deter ‘wrong’ behaviour (ACOSS, 2001a, p.2; Bryson, 1993; Hall, 1998; Hartman, 2001; Kinnear, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999; von Hayek, 2000).

*At Question 30, 93% of respondents, 52 out of 56 people **indicated that upon receiving a breach penalty their self-esteem was decreased.***

The Government *expects* to make unemployed welfare recipients feel guilty. Particularly those suspected of not having “genuine need” (Newman, 2000, p. 7) or those who ‘need to confess’ to possibly having received any non-entitled

benefit (Dullroy, 2002). However the shaming process continues unabated, against *all unemployed welfare beneficiaries*, as the Government attempts to demonise unemployed 'dole bludgers'.

Ironically, as noted in Chapter Two, commentators including Minister Vanstone, acknowledged that deliberate welfare fraud and 'bludging' is of minuscule proportion amongst approximately six million social welfare recipients, particularly when compared to the cost of taxation fraud (Nolan, 1997, p. 186; Sleep, 2001; Vanstone, 2002b).

On the shaming theme, Minister Newman promulgated the idea that there exists a "very severe stigma on people who remain on welfare support", and such people should not remain on welfare "forever" (McKenna, 1999). The purpose of the rhetoric is to ensure that welfare recipients feel shamed, even without having been breached, with consequent lower self-esteem. The implied idea that unemployment is the fault of unemployed welfare beneficiaries is regularly noted in the literature (Gilmour et al., 2000, p. 3; Goodin, 2001, pp. 196-197).

This raises the possibility that the Government's *intent* in dealing with unemployed welfare recipients is to treat unemployed people in a different manner to other people who also receive welfare benefits and the community at large. Various examples of intended unfairness were noted in the literature. As previously noted, the Commonwealth Ombudsman found Centrelink was

applying breaches “without due process” (McLeod, 2000, p.51) and was ‘too quick to breach’ (Eldridge, 2001).

Supporting the idea of differential treatment, it was noted in Chapter Two that the INTRALINK manual for Centrelink officers stated “job seekers **must not** be given the benefit of the doubt” (ACOSS, 2001a, p. 6, bolding in original). Similarly, this researcher heard many respondents state that “Centrelink does not listen”. It was noted that other sections of the community are not compulsorily obligated to the extent that unemployed welfare recipients are (Hartman, 2001).

Also previously noted, breach penalty levels often exceed the value of fines imposed for many criminal convictions, which prompted ACOSS (2001b) to ask “is it fair?” (pp. 3-11). On fairness, it needs to be remembered that “Australia’s system of economic management has relied on creating joblessness to sustain economic growth” (Kinnear, 2000, p. v). Differential treatment and fairness will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

*This survey indicated that 95% of the 56 respondents at Question 16, a large majority of 53 people, **thought that Centrelink was not being fair to them.***

Fairness can also be related to the extent that people receive proper explanations as to the requirements expected of them, and that due process,

including pre-notification of potential breaches, would be an integral part of Centrelink processes.

*However, at Question 23, a large majority, 91% of respondents, 51 people, **did not expect to be breached before the penalty was applied.***

Whether or not the Howard Government *intended* to be unfair to this particular welfare group, the lived experience of *this survey's* respondents strongly corroborated their expressed *feelings* that they were unfairly treated.

The final important findings of *this study* to be presented here do not fit the categories of Government *expectation* and *intent*. The literature provided anecdotal evidence that people who have received breaches have subsequently suffered economic hardship, often becoming obliged to rely for survival on family and charity. Some have become homeless (four in *this survey*), or resorted to unlawful activities and other forms of illegal economic support. One respondent to *this survey* wrote "selling drugs to survive" (ACOSS, 2001b, p. 24; Moses & Sharples, 2000; Nevile, 2001; Sleep, 2001, p. 10).

However, no evidence was uncovered in the literature to indicate that the Government means for these outcomes to happen. There exists however a body of literature that identifies 'the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action' (Merton, 1936). See also Burgess et al., (2000); Sleep, (2001).

Government policies can be unstated on occasion (Bridgman & Davis, 2000) and the unanticipated and unstated aspects that arose from *this survey's* findings are reported here.

**Findings on Government unanticipated consequences of breaching.**

*This survey* identified one 'unanticipated consequence' finding:

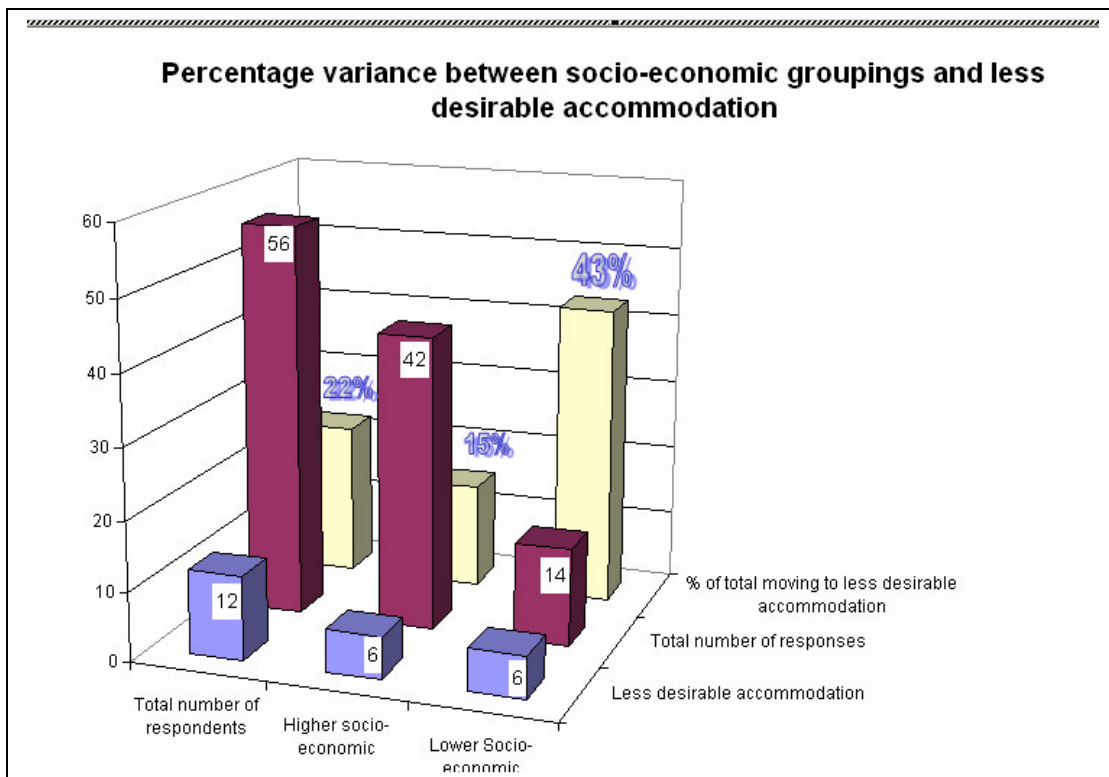
*At Questions 31 and 32, there were 13 respondents who indicated that they needed to shift to other accommodation after being breached, **and 12 of these indicated they moved to less desirable accommodation.***

Those 12 people, out of 56 respondents, represent a sizeable 22 per cent. It does not seem plausible that Government would anticipate such a high level of social disruption arising from its breaching policy, as homelessness and criminal activities of themselves become problems for Government.

Hazlehurst and Braithwaite, (1993) reported "statistics show that both victims and perpetrators of crime are predominately under the age of twenty-nine; are unmarried, male, and unemployed; have low employment and educational opportunities; live in highly urbanised areas and/or display a high level of residential mobility" (p. 384).

Figure 6, below, illustrates the proportions of respondents to *this survey* who needed to move into less desirable accommodation. A larger proportion, 43 per cent of the 14 respondents from the lower socio-economic areas around Nundah Centrelink, contrasted with 15 per cent of the 42 respondents who came from higher socio-economic areas around the Mitchelton and Chermside survey sites.

**Figure 6: Diagrammatic representation of the total, higher and lower socio-economic respondents moving into less desirable accommodation.**



The statistical description of victims and perpetrators of crime, outlined above, appears to correlate well with the demographics of the respondents to *this study*, particularly those from the socio-economically disadvantaged area of Nundah (Wilson, 2002, p.27).

Of the 12 people who moved to lesser accommodation, 10 were aged 30 or under, 11 were male, all lived in urban Brisbane and most reported needing to seek help from family and charity. Published crime statistics, such as those above, are in the public domain. However, the relatively high levels of the 'unanticipated' consequence of people who are breached needing to move into less desirable housing, and even onto the streets, as experienced by some respondents to *this survey* is not well understood by the community. This lack of general awareness supports the notion that there could be some unanticipated policy outcomes attributable to the Howard Coalition Government.

### **Findings on Government unstated consequences of breaching.**

The literature suggests that governments with neo-liberal agendas seek to relocate responsibility for welfare back to community welfare agencies, church groups and the families of individual welfare recipients, without specifically stating that as policy (Burgess et al., 1998; Burgess et al., 2000; Donald, 2000; Harris, 1998; Sleep, 2001; Stilwell, 1993).

At question 24 of this survey, 'Did you get help from others?' 23 respondents selected 'family', 15 indicated 'welfare charity' and 7 indicated 'your church'. In each of the years 1999, 2000 and 2001, six respondents nominated 'charity' as a source of help after being breached. **However in the first 4 months of 2002, eight people nominated 'charity'.**

*This number suggests large increases in dependence upon charity occurring in 2002, and that growth corroborates the increased trend of demand for charity assistance reported in the literature (ACOSS, 2001b; Horan, 2001; Nevile, 2001; Stavropoulos, 2000).*

Government Ministers come close to openly stating their desire to shift welfare responsibility from government to community. Prime Minister Howard's stated purpose is "to build a new social coalition of government, business, charitable and welfare organisations, and other community groups...to tackle more effectively the social problems..." (Howard, 1999, p. 6). Ministers Vanstone and Abbott jointly announced new funding "to strengthen families and communities and prevent serious social problems occurring" (Vanstone & Abbott, 2001. p. 17). Unstated consequences will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The findings from *this study* suggested four aspects for discussion:

- The Howard Government's stated *expectations* about breaching practice.
- The Howard Government's stated *intent* about developing self-esteem.
- *Unanticipated* policy outcomes.
- *Unstated* policy agendas.

### **Government *expectation* about the effectiveness of coercive practice.**

The Howard Government has consistently tightened its coercive practices in the breaching regime by increasing penalty frequency and cost for failure to comply with activity test requirements under Mutual Obligation ideology (Atkins, 2002; Pearce et al., 2002). However the majority of respondents to *this survey* reported that getting breached was of no help to them in avoiding further breaches. Indeed the majority of respondents were breached more than once, and 14 per cent had third breaches. This accords with the literature (ACOSS, 2001b).

Similarly, contrary to Government expectation, *this survey* found a large number of respondents (73%) believed that they were *not* more likely to get paid work as a result of their undertaking compulsory Centrelink activities. These findings raise questions about the effectiveness of compliance requirements and deterrent

effects of breaching, which the Government claimed for them, but were in line with the literature (CPC, 2002; DEWRSB, 2000).

The Howard Government had developed a number of expectations about the effectiveness of a robust compliance regime to ensure unemployed people would actively seek work and move 'off-benefit' quickly (Centrelink, 2001a; DEWRSB, 2001; Moses & Sharples, 2000; CPC, 2002, sect.6, p. 17). Sleep (2001) suggested the neo-liberal agenda drew on Foucault's approach to governance; "as managing populations through administrative techniques that convince individuals to discipline themselves" (p.14).

As previously noted, high levels of unemployment had become entrenched, and a seemingly intractable problem for Government policy makers (Edwards et al., 2001, p.144). Gilmour et al. (2000) reported that "welfare recipients' obligations to society have been most clearly and extensively discussed in DEWRSB and DFACS policy documents" (p. 3).

Subsequently Allard pointed to claims about the "culture of welfare dependency" and the rise of the "job snob". Allard noted that Ministers were saying it was individual culture rather than economic policy which gave rise to high unemployment rates, so as to justify the punitive breaching requirements under Mutual Obligation (cited in Gilmour et al., 2000, p.3). Hartman (2001) argued that "blaming the victim" could justify less spending [on welfare] and a "punitive

approach to the unemployed” (p. 3), which reflected Government *expectations* as to the political acceptability of its policies publicly, and within the bureaucracy.

An officer within the Department of Family and Community Services, (Pearse, 2000) reported the differential result between a pilot program’s interview attendance rates for beneficiaries who were *required* to attend (82%) and those who were *invited* (17%). This officer continued confidently; “one of the most important findings of the pilot study was how effective the compulsory approach was at bringing customers in to an interview and how little adverse reaction there was to a compulsory approach” (pp. 3-8).

Minister Anthony, defending Government policy about rising breach numbers, stated: “However the vast majority of job seekers have no problem fulfilling their mutual obligation requirements. Around 82% of job seekers are never breached” (Anthony, 2001). That statement has a different connotation, or ‘spin’, to the reality that almost one fifth of job seekers *are* now breached, compared to less than one tenth just three years ago (Sleep, 2001).

McKenna (1999) reported the Howard Government’s *expectation*, that coercion, compulsion and heavy penalties for failure to comply with activity tests, will create public opprobrium against ‘the unemployed’, thus effectively minimising the ‘problem of the unemployed’ by making it “harder for people to choose welfare over work” (p. 11).

However, the literature is often critical of the attitude of neo-liberal governments toward welfare. Jennings (2001) argued that conservative forces have a common misconception: “That poverty is the result of primarily individual choice rather than as an outcome of social policies”. She argued further that the Howard Government believes people are responsible for outcomes over which they have no control (such as insufficient jobs), so that “blaming the victim allows policy makers to absolve themselves from responsibility” (p. 4).

Professor Pearce discussed the Pearce et al. (2002) report on television, confirming that breaching incidences had tripled during the past three years. The ex-Ombudsman believed that being breached created disincentives to seek work, and reduced the ability to look for work, thereby harming the chances of individuals to find employment. Thus he thought breaching to be counter productive, concluding that he “personally believed that you don’t induce” by “beating up” but by offering an inducement of “help” (ABC, 2002).

Such conclusions were supported by Burgess et al. (2000) who wrote about the “doomed” nature of “workfare” as a means of enforcing reciprocal obligations. See also (Goodin, 2001, pp. 1-92; Lawrence, 2002; Windschuttle, 980). Sleep (2001) argued that “hard-liners assume all breaches are legitimate”, but there was insufficient recognition that “Centrelink is not infallible” (p. 10), because the Government *expected* the compliance regime would be an effective deterrent.

The Government erroneously *expects* a harsher penalty regime will coerce people to find jobs in an environment of high unemployment. Figures of between 7 and 10 unemployed people for every job vacancy are given in the literature (ACOSS, 2001). Lawrence (2002) had pointed out that there are “still ten job seekers for every one vacancy” and “getting tough” on “dole bludgers” cannot fix any unemployment problem (pp. 2-4). Moses and Sharples (2000) addressed the issue of making breach penalties harsher, arguing that such action would not have much effect on breach rates because earlier “*Working Nation* changes also made breach penalties harsher, but breach rates remained fairly constant from 1995 to 1998” (p. 11).

Paradoxically, Moses and Sharples (2000) introduced the argument that “if the main objective of making breach penalties harsher is to deter people from failing to meet their requirements, then the measure of success of any such policy...is the extent to which breach numbers fall” (p. 11). Breach numbers have not fallen, they have risen substantially, and respondents to *this survey* report that the coercion they experienced did not help them search harder for work because they were already looking as hard as they could.

### **Government *intent* about development of self-esteem and fairness.**

One cannot ‘know’ intent, however Prime Ministerial statements about Government needing to exhibit “fairness” and provide for “equality of opportunity”

for people who comply with Mutual Obligation, which will “improve prospects for [their] self-reliance” (Howard, 1999, pp. 2-9), include euphemisms for ‘improving self-esteem’ and greater ‘employability’. Further, Minister Anthony stated that involvement in Mutual Obligation activity “leaves people with a sense of pride and belonging” (Anthony, 2000, p.1). The results from *this survey* appear to be contrary to the Government’s stated *intent* as to fairness or self-esteem.

Important responses to *this survey* recorded most people reporting loss of self-esteem and many felt Centrelink put pressure on them to go ‘off-benefit’ permanently. Many respondents felt they could not look any harder for work and an overwhelming majority believed that Centrelink was being unfair to them.

In terms of self-esteem, there is support for the notion that “people want to work”, even when subjected to the “churning” treadmill of low paid casual jobs in an employment market that demonstrably has insufficient jobs (Lawrence, 2002, p.2; Burgess et al., 1998; McKinnon & Dorries, 1999; Quiggin, 2001). Goodin, (2001) argued that “most of those who want to work, but don’t”, are unemployed due to external circumstances that have “nothing to do with the sort of ‘weakness of will’ arguments” put forward (pp. 196-197). Reliant on social security, the respondents to *this survey* considered their self-esteem under attack.

The ‘dole bludger’ and thinly veiled ‘it is their own fault’ rhetoric is palpable. See the ‘labeling’ comments of (Anthony, 2000; Newman, 2000; Vanstone & Abbott,

2001). *This survey* also found that most respondents did not realise beforehand that they were going to be breached, suggesting Centrelink has a lack of concern as to customer rights, due process and procedural fairness.

The Howard Government, using Mutual Obligation ideology, *intends* to coerce people to remain “active and connected” with the workplace, believing that their chances of finding work would thus be enhanced (Parnell, 2002, p.2; Richardson, 2000). The *intent* is well understood within Government. Moses and Sharples (2000) mused: “For policy makers (short of reviewing the entire concept of breaching) the important question...is how best to target breaching to ensure that it is achieving its purpose of deterring non-genuine job seekers and ensuring that people are doing all they can to return to work?” (p. 20).

MacDonald and Abello (2001) reported “increased pressure from the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business” to increase breaching levels (p.3). Burgess et al. (1998) observed application of increased compliance measures (p. 13) and Minister Vanstone (2002a) announced “additional scrutiny” of beneficiaries so as to ensure continuation of a “robust mutual obligation system” (p. 2). As noted in Chapter Two, automated paperless breach processes (DEWRSB, 2001) and excessive breach penalty fines all attest to Government *intent* to coerce unemployed people ‘off-benefit’ in a manner often seen as being unfair (ACOSS, 2001a).

Again on *intent*, the Australian compliance system is “already among the toughest in the world” (ACOSS, 2001a). As to fairness, the Prime Minister’s own Youth Pathways Taskforce summary report commented that the coercive nature of the breaching regime by Centrelink was “too rigid in applying activity tests” to young people experiencing life difficulties (Eldridge, 2001). Similarly the Ombudsman and ACOSS have criticised the inequitable and flawed nature of the breaching regime, as noted earlier (McLeod, 2001, p.52; ACOSS, 2001b, p.3).

Hartman (2001) argued the Howard Government’s application of Mutual Obligation, which “elaborates the responsibilities of the unemployed and other jobless welfare recipients and renders them accountable for their activities in a way that is not reciprocated by other so-called stakeholders in society, government and business” (pp. 5-6) represents differential treatment.

As a counter to the claim of differential treatment, DFACS (2000) argued that “some form of financial sanction must be available as a last resort” for unemployed people because “business and government also face formal sanctions when requirements are not met” (p. 40). However, the notion that businesses or Government itself could have **all** income revenue cut off totally for eight weeks as a ‘normal sanction’, as happens to people in the breaching regime, appears “highly unlikely” as defined by (Neuman, 1997).

As to self-esteem and fairness, Tomlinson (2001) argued that there can be no reciprocity or respect due to the power imbalance: “Unemployed people and the Government can’t have *the same relation each towards the other*” (p. 6, italics in original). Tomlinson (2001) also argued that the “Howard Government’s ‘mutual obligation’ agenda is considered to be in breach of the international agreements which Australia has signed and ratified”. He cited Article 8(3)(a) of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, which provides that “No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour” (pp. 10-11), as in *Work for the Dole*. See also (Burgess et al., 1998, p. 17).

Kinnear (2000) declared that the Howard Government’s Mutual Obligation policies failed ethically and morally. Citing Rawls, Kinnear argued that Government institutional programs “must be just, and individuals must have freely accepted the benefits provided by society”. She found the two conditionalities were not met (p. v). Goodin (2001) argued the unfairness of one-sided Government relationships with welfare recipients succinctly, decrying the attendant duress (p. 191). Duress does not appear to be conducive to development of individual self-esteem, yet that is a stated Government *intent*.

Government *intention* to reduce welfare dependency is demonstrably unnecessary. In a seminal longitudinal study conducted over 10 years in three countries, The United States, The Netherlands and Germany, Goodin, Heady, Muffels, and Dirven (1999) found an “exceedingly small percentage” of people

remained on welfare indefinitely, in any of those national welfare systems. Further, they found the rhetoric of “welfare dependency” referred to in those countries, and often heard in Australia, to be unfounded (pp. 136-145).

The Government’s recently stated *intent* to target almost all unemployed people through Centrelink’s activity testing and breaching program (Jackman, 2002, p. 5; Centrelink, 2001a) because of suspicion that unemployed people fail to meet activity requirements that have little to do with willingness to work, is excessive (Lawrence, 2002). Windschuttle (1980) had debunked the myth of “dole bludgers” twenty years earlier (pp. 155-179).

Concluding this discussion on Government *intent*, the Government had commissioned the McClure report on Welfare reform, to which ACOSS (2000) responded: “The Government must take serious heed of [the report’s] central message – that the current reliance on one-sided obligations and harsh penalties is a wrong and counter-productive path.” Further obligations on unemployed people “should be reasonable and fair”, so that penalties “are used only as a last resort and are reduced to levels appropriate to people on low incomes” (p.2).

***An unanticipated consequence of Government breaching policy.***

Two findings in Chapter Five, arising from *this survey* did not seem to ‘fit’ with the Howard Government’s stated *expectation* or *intent*. An apparently *unanticipated*

outcome surfaced, another outcome appeared to reflect *unstated* policy. The unanticipated consequence of breaching that surfaced was that many more people than expected needed to move into less desirable accommodation after being breached.

It is not plausible to believe that the Government *intends* or *expects* its Mutual Obligation based breaching program should create homelessness or push people who have been breached into less desirable accommodation. Yet from *the survey*, 12 people out of 56 (almost 22%) needed to move into less desirable accommodation, including 10 males under 30 years of age. It is important to reiterate that most of the respondents to *this survey* were still unemployed and partially 'on-benefit', because they were without legitimate options for survival, other than limited family or charitable support.

Patterns of poverty, unemployment and homelessness for young males who have been breached by Centrelink are highlighted in *this survey*. A secondary analysis of data from 14 responses collected from outside Nundah Centrelink, which is situated in a lower socio-economic area than the other two *survey* sites (Wilson, 2002) indicated that six out of the 14 respondents (almost half), needed to move into less desirable accommodation. One of these people reported moving "on the streets", another to a homeless shelter. There appears to be a correlation between breaching, reduced housing standards and homelessness for people in lower socio-economic circumstances.

The Howard Government may not have *intended* for its breaching regime to cause people to move into less desirable accommodation, or drive them 'off-benefit' into illegal activity. DEWRSB's (2001) Program Monitoring Survey found that between 20 and 30 per cent of Job Network program participants left the programs, thus going 'off-benefit', but for "reasons that were *not known*". DEWRSB suggested possible reasons could include "changes in family/living arrangements and clients leaving the labour market" (p.15, italics added).

It is known that the Government intentionally targeted young people under Mutual Obligation initially (DEWRSB, 1999; Sleep, 2001, p. 9). Only recently has there been a shift towards targeting older welfare recipients, and other categories of welfare beneficiaries, with changes generally applying from July 2002 (Moscaritolo & Keim, 2001). The deliberate targeting of younger people may partially explain why, in *this survey*, so many young people needed to downgrade to less desirable accommodation after being breached. That outcome is in line with the literature (Eldridge, 2001).

It may also be that the young people surveyed in *this study*, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, may have been disadvantaged in terms of educational and skill acquisition opportunities, with consequent disadvantage as to employability. Such disadvantage tends to limit people, as they are able to access only temporary, low-paid, casualised work (Lawrence, 2002). Further compounding that limiting disadvantage, younger people are generally unable to

access credit facilities, which would enable them to maintain a stable residence. Consequently, only high cost, barely 'affordable' rental market housing is accessible (Nevile, 2001). The precarious affordability that allows this existence is jeopardised immediately when a breach penalty reduces or stops fortnightly income.

Anglicare Australia's *State of Family 2001* report cited Metherell's survey of 13 homeless youth shelters in Sydney, which had found that more than "one third of those using the centres" had been breached by Centrelink (Nevile, 2001, p.30; Rollason, 2001). The fact that one third of the most vulnerable people who were *using the centres and had been breached* raises questions for further research. Little is known about homeless people without the *ability* to access homeless shelters, but who have also been breached. ACOSS (2001b) reported "anecdotal evidence also points, in some cases, to an increase in theft and unlawful activity in order [for those breached] to survive" (p. 24).

***An unstated Government policy to return welfare to the community.***

The second aspect of the findings of *this study* that did not 'fit' with the Howard Government's stated *expectation* or *intent* represents an unstated policy. It is unstated that Centrelink breaching practices should drive unemployed welfare recipients 'off-benefit', thereby forcing them to seek support from family or community, church or welfare organisations, in order to survive. In *this survey*, 23

people indicated that they obtained assistance from family, 15 people indicated being helped by charities and seven indicated that their church was of help. These rates of charity support need, and increases in usage, are in line with the literature (ACOSS, 2001b; Horan, 2001; Nevile, 2001, p. 30).

For example, whilst Government Departments speculated on probable policy outcomes, the speculation was not identified as official policy. Moses and Sharples (2000) reported a “very conservative” estimate that **“27% of people who are breached do not reclaim within 6 weeks”**. They suggested “it could be argued that for some the system just becomes too hard and that they turn to relatives, the welfare sector or crime for support” (p. 17, bolding in original).

Minister Newman stressed the importance of “ensuring that support does not go unconditionally for long periods to people with the capacity to contribute to their own support...” (Newman, 2000, p. 5). Ministers Vanstone and Abbott jointly announced new funding “to strengthen families and communities and prevent serious social problems occurring” (Vanstone & Abbott, 2001, p. 17).

Prime Minister Howard provided the strongest indication that policy is often unstated, but of primary importance, regardless of delivery systems;

Policy mechanisms or fashions are never ends in themselves. In defining the right approach to both economic and social policies, we should always remember that it is the goals of national policy which are the critically important determining factor, and not the mechanism for implementing policies or the ideologies that may support them (Howard, 1999) (pp. 2-3).

The Howard Government continues producing politically expedient 'policy on the run' changes to Mutual Obligation (Quiggin, 2001, pp. 11-12). For example, recent announcements outlining new categories of beneficiaries that will be required to Work for the Dole (Atkins, 2002), and new authority for Centrelink to apply instant payment 'suspension' rules, thereby stopping *all* payment, rather than initial payment reductions (Vanstone, 2002a, p. 2). The changes were introduced, ostensibly to make breaching less damaging to 'the disadvantaged'.

However the changes will include tough new Centrelink psychological assessment procedures that have been designed to enable Centrelink to check eligibility that can facilitate benefit suspension 'on suspicion' of likelihood to be breached (Centrelink, 2002). The 'policy on the run' changes are a part of "keeping the breaching regime tough" (Vanstone, 2002a, pp. 2-3), which is seen as a "political imperative" (Burgess et al., 1998, p.2).

As found in *this study*, breaching practices impacted on the lives of *the survey* respondents in unanticipated or unstated ways in terms of policy implementation. Tomlinson (1999) juxtaposed the Government's implied notion that it is socially 'bad' to develop a dependency on government welfare, but socially 'good' that other family members of people who are welfare beneficiaries are "forced into a co-dependency relationship with each other" (p.5). Ironically, when the Coalition came to power, it eschewed job creation policies and focussed on the "self-reliance" of workers in an open labour market (Quiggin, 2001 p.11).

However high levels of unemployment, and precarious forms of casualised employment, did not provide sufficient employment or the “necessary conditions to facilitate self-reliance in the form of superannuation savings” (Carson & Kerr, 2001, p. 15). See also Eardley’s (1998) discussion on the “working poor” whose low paid, casual and part time work maintains poverty.

The literature identifies evidence to show that people who have been breached, “return to benefit receipt” within months, because they have no choice (Richardson, 2000, p. 17). Returning to benefit is contrary to the Government’s stated *expectation* or *intent*. Most respondents to *this survey* did select non-government support providers, but found that unsustainable, continuing to need income support from Centrelink.

Thus it is evident that Government breaching policy, whether intentionally or unintentionally designed to drive people toward community provided support, has not been successful. Indeed, of the four Howard Government policy areas discussed; the *expected*, the *intended*, the *unexpected* and the *unstated*, none have been shown to be operating in line with the Howard Government’s stated policies. This lack of success is evidenced by responses to *this survey*. What has also been evident, is that the policies and breaching practices implemented under Mutual Obligation strike at the most vulnerable and least advantaged people within the Brisbane community (ACOSS, 2001b; Nevile, 2001).

**CONCLUSION:**

As stated at the outset, the central objective of *this study* was to explore the lived experience of people who had been breached by Centrelink, to assess if their experiences matched what the Howard Government *expected* and *intended*, when it applied its evolving breaching policies and practices, based upon the ideology of Mutual Obligation.

The choice for a qualitative survey was determined by time and resource constraints, and was based on an extensive literature review including 'inside' Government perspectives and data. Essential background material, relating to the nature of entrenched unemployment conditions and Mutual Obligation ideology was incorporated to underscore the 'justification' that the Howard Government provides when applying its demonstrably harsh breaching regime.

The quoted literature identified harm done to unemployed individuals when breached. For instance Anglicare asserted that Centrelink's "punish first" approach was costly for individuals (Rollason, 2001), and there was recognition that compulsory obligations on unemployed people were unreasonable and unfair (ACOSS, 2000, p.2). *This survey* found that people who were breached had their lives seriously affected in one or more of four major areas. The Howard Government does not publicly acknowledge that these outcome effects have resulted from Government policies.

*This survey* found that Mutual Obligation ideology and mandatory activity test requirements led to people, who were breached, experiencing frustration, decreased self-esteem and strong feelings of being unfairly treated. Many of those people also needed to move into less desirable accommodation, reinforcing a need for further research in this area. Their plight appears to negate the often boasted about claims proclaiming the effectiveness of the “safety net” the Howard Government provides for people “genuinely in need” (Howard, 1999, p. 4; Vanstone, 2002a).

**APPENDICES:**

**Appendix One:** Complete survey instrument with 'informed consent'.

**Appendix Two:** The on-site advertising signs inviting participants.

**Appendix Three:** Note of visit to Qld. Police and Brisbane Council.

**Appendix Four:** Courtesy letter to CEO, Centrelink notifying survey.

**Appendix Five:** 'Authorisation to proceed' letter from UHREC.

**Appendix One: Complete survey instrument with 'informed consent'.**

**A SURVEY**

**DO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN BREACHED BY CENTRELINK MATCH THE EXPECTATION, INTENT AND PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT?**

This research survey is being conducted as part of my Masters Degree studies in Social Science at Queensland University of Technology during 2002.

My name is Simon Schooneveldt, and I can be contacted through QUT Carseldine, at the School of Humanities and Human Services (see numbers below) or direct via my mobile phone message bank on 0407 625 853.

This survey is anonymous. You will not be asked for your name, address or any identifying information. It is an entirely voluntary way for people who are 18 years and older, and who have received a breach penalty from Centrelink, to have a say about their breaching experience(s).

The research is aimed at increasing knowledge about whether the 'real – life' experiences of survey participants are similar to what Centrelink and the Government expected, or if they are different. The findings of the research may be presented at seminars and conferences in the future.

Therefore your participation will be helpful. The questionnaire form can be filled out right now and will take about 15 minutes. The form is mostly "tick the box" in style, but there are places where you can write extra comments if you wish.

You can keep this cover sheet if you would like to, after handing back the completed survey part to me.

Should you require further information please feel free to contact my Supervisor, Dr. John Tomlinson at QUT on 3864 4528.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the way that I am conducting this survey, you can contact the Secretary of The University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3864 2902.

Thank you, Simon Schooneveldt.

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

1: Are you aged 18 years or older? (please tick box)  Yes  No

2: Have you ever been breached by Centrelink?  Yes  No

**If under 18 years, or you have never been breached, no need to continue.**

3: Are you under 30 years old? (please tick box)  Yes  No

4: Are you male or female? (please tick box)  M  F

5: How would you best describe your living arrangements?

(please tick box)

Single, living alone  Single, sharing group house  Living with partner

Living with partner and children  Single, with children  Other.....

6: When you were breached, what Centrelink payment were you getting?

(please tick box)

Newstart.  Youth Allowance.  Parenting Payment.

Partner Allowance.  Disability Support Pension.  Austudy.

Other Payment .....

7: How long were you on that payment before getting breached?

(please tick box)

1 - 6 Months.  7 Months to 1 Year.  1 to 2 Years.  More than 2 years.

**8:** What is your main activity currently?

(please tick box):

- Part time work.       Looking for work.       studying.       Home Duties.  
 Retired                       Other.....

**9:** In which years were you breached?

(please tick any years that apply to you):

1999.               2000.               2001.               2002.

**10:** How many times have you been breached in the last 4 years?

(please tick box)

- Once.               Twice.               3 times.               More than 3 times.

**11:** If you have had what Centrelink calls an Administrative Breach, please tick the box showing number of times:

- Once                       Twice                       More than twice

**12:** If you have had what Centrelink calls an Activity Breach,

please tick the box showing number of times:

- Once                       Twice                       Three times or more

**13:** What were the penalty or penalties that you received?

(please tick one or more of the boxes that apply to you)

- Nil payment at all for 2 weeks
- 16% reduction for 13 weeks
- 18% reduction for 26 weeks
- 24% reduction for 26 weeks
- Nil payment at all for 8 weeks

**14:** Did Centrelink give you any reasons why they gave you a penalty breach?

(please tick box)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**15:** If you answered Yes, do you remember any reasons Centrelink gave you?

(Typical reasons could be that 'you didn't turn up for an interview' or that Centrelink thought 'you didn't fill out your job seeker diary well enough.')

Your answer here: .....  
.....  
.....

**16:** When you got breached, did you think that Centrelink was being fair to you?

(please tick box)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**17:** Do you feel that Centrelink puts you under pressure to make you go off benefits permanently?

(please tick box)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**18:** Did you realise that you could appeal against Centrelink's decision to give you a breach penalty?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

**19:** Did you appeal your breach penalty decision to Centrelink?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

**20:** If you appealed, was your appeal successful?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

**21:** If you appealed, how long did your appeal process take?

please place the nearest number in the box for either:

weeks      or       months

**22:** If your breaches meant that Centrelink stopped **all** benefit payments to you, how long was it before you re-applied to Centrelink for another benefit? Please place the nearest number in the box for either:

weeks      or       months.

**23:** Did you expect to get breached before the penalty was actually given to you by Centrelink ? (Did you see it coming?)

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

Any comment? .....  
.....

**24:** After you received a breach penalty, did you get any help from others?

(please tick one or more boxes to best describe who you went to for any help)

Family?     Friends?     Welfare Rights Group?     Your Church?  
 Welfare charity agency?     Other? .....

**25:** Do you think the threat of a breach penalty made you look harder for a job?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

You can add a comment about your answer here:

.....  
.....

**26:** Has Centrelink given you a compulsory activity under their Mutual Obligation rules, such as "Work for the Dole" or a course of study?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

**27:** If you answered Yes, what were you compelled to do?

( please answer here).....

.....

**28:** Have you signed a “Preparing for Work Agreement” with Centrelink ?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

**29:** Do you think that any activity Centrelink has made you do has meant that you have become more likely to get paid work?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

**30:** When you received a breach penalty, was your self-esteem increased or decreased?

(please tick box)

Increased       Decreased       Don't know

**31:** Did getting a breach penalty help you to avoid being breached again?

(please tick box)

Yes       No       Don't know

**32:** After you were breached, did you stay in your existing residence?

(please tick box)

Yes       No.

**33:** If you answered No, did you shift into:

(please tick box):

d) equally desirable accommodation?       Yes       No

e) less desirable accommodation?       Yes       No

c) Some other accommodation? Please describe .....

.....  
.....

Thank you for participating in this QUT University Student research survey.

Simon Schooneveldt.

Appendix Two: The on-site advertising signs inviting participants.

**HAVE YOU BEEN  
BREACHED  
BY  
CENTRELINK??**



**A UNIVERSITY  
STUDENT  
SURVEY**  
for those 18 and older  
**HAVE YOUR SAY  
NOW!**

### **Appendix Three: Note of visit to Qld. Police and Brisbane Council.**

#### **THESIS; RESEARCH PREPARATION FILE NOTES:**

##### ETHICAL APPLICATION TASKS/ NOTES

9.57am: Visited Ferny Grove Police District Headquarters. Saturday  
09/03/2002

Spoke with Duty Desk Constable, who was supported by his Senior Sargent.

Submitted pro-forma of my proposed sign (including QUT logo) with an outline of my intent to conduct a survey on the footpath, outside of Centrelink offices.

As it happened, the Constable had done a similar university survey (70 respondents) during his studies, and the organisation he surveyed simply asked him for any findings at completion, so that they could get any useful feedback.

In the event, the Police have no problem with the proposed research activity and confirmed that it is not unlawful.

On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2002, 9.45AM:

I visited Marjorie at the Gap Ward office of Councilor Geraldine Knapp of Brisbane City Council. Marjorie telephoned By-Laws Officer Peter, who confirmed her opinion that my proposal was OK, including using a card table, as long as the footpath not obstructed. There was no problem with only two or 3 days appearance on site. She likened it to charity footpath cake stalls. Temporary signage OK (I had shown my prototype sign) and no licence would be required by Council.

NB: I searched the web for both of these agencies and found nothing on my particular request about conducting a street/ footpath survey.

Also discussed with Jacquie (a researcher) the pro-forma proposed sign, which would contain the phrase "have your say now". She advised that is legitimated by the use of open questions that allow writing in boxes on the survey questionnaire.

Advised my QUT Supervisor, Dr John Tomlinson of these responses at meeting at QUT Carseldine, this day, Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2002.

Simon Schooneveldt.

**Appendix Four: Courtesy letter to CEO, Centrelink notifying survey.**

The Chief Executive Officer, Ms Sue Vardon,  
CENTRELINK  
PO Box 7788  
Canberra Business Centre  
ACT. 2610.

April 5, 2002

Dear Ms Vardon,

**RE: Upcoming survey on Centrelink client breaching in Brisbane.**

I write as a courtesy, to advise you that during the next two months I will be conducting a questionnaire type survey of people, aged 18 or over, who have received breach penalties from Centrelink. The survey is being conducted as a part of my post-graduate studies for a Masters Degree in Social Science within the School of Humanities and Human Services at the Carseldine campus of Queensland University of Technology.

As sole researcher, I will passively and lawfully position myself on public property outside various Brisbane Centrelink offices, equipped with appropriate signage. The signs have been designed to attract the attention of potential survey participants who may be in that vicinity, inviting them to approach myself as the researcher and thus become enabled to participate in the survey.

I have submitted the proposed survey method and intended signage to the Queensland Police Service and the Brisbane City Council, and ascertained the acceptability and lawfulness of the proposed survey. Additionally, I have secured written approvals to proceed with the survey program from my academic research supervisor at QUT, together with the Head of The School of Humanities and Human Services at QUT Carseldine and the Chairperson of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC).

Yours sincerely

Simon Schooneveldt.

**Appendix Five: 'Authorisation to proceed' letter from UHREC.**

Confirmation of exemption – 2578H

Dear Simon

I write further to the Checklist for Researchers you submitted for your project, "Do the lived experiences of people who have been breached by Centrelink match the expectations, intent and purpose of Government?" (QUT Ref No 2578H).

The Chairperson of the University Human Research Ethics Committee has considered your Checklist and asked that I contact you on her behalf. The Chairperson has confirmed that your project is in fact exempt from full ethical clearance.

This decision is subject to the inclusion of the standard reference to the Secretary of UHREC in the informed consent materials.

**However, you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.**

Failure to provide, in a timely manner, the requested information (eg the revised informed consent material) may result in the authorisation to commence the research being withdrawn.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries in relation to this matter.

Regards

Gary Allen  
Secretary, UHREC  
x2902

Wednesday, April 03, 2002 11:58 AM

## REFERENCE LIST (Bibliography):

- ABC. (2002). *Segment on Professor Pearce's Independent Report on the prevalence of Breaching* [TV news report]. Sydney: ABC Television.
- CPC. (2002). *Draft Report: Independent review of Job Network*, [Internet Publication release]. Commonwealth Productivity Commission. Available: <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/jobnetwork/draftreport/> [May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2002].
- DEWRSB. (1999). *Evaluation of the work for the dole pilot programme*, [Commonwealth Departmental Program Evaluation]. Evaluation and Monitoring Branch, Labour Market Policy Group. Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Available: <http://www.dewrsb.gov.au/group/imp/files/evaluations.htm> [March, 2001].
- DEWRSB. (2000). *Work for the dole: A net impact study*. Evaluation and [Program Performance Branch, Labor Market Policy Group], Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Canberra: Available: <http://www.dewrsb.gov.au/> [August, 2000].
- DEWRSB. (2001). *Job network: a net impact study* (EPPB Report 1/2001). Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Canberra. Available: <http://www.dewrsb.gov.au/> [November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2001]
- ACOSS. (1998), (Updated July 1999 Info sheet 113). *Poverty Factsheet: Two million living in poverty*, [Media infopaper] Available: [http://www.acoss.org.au/media/1998/poverty\\_facts.htm](http://www.acoss.org.au/media/1998/poverty_facts.htm) [12<sup>th</sup> August 1999].
- ACOSS. (2000). *ACOSS briefing paper no 2: The final report of the welfare review (August 2000)*, [Press/ Information report]. ACOSS. Available: <http://www.acoss.org.au/media/2000/info216/htm> [October 2000].
- ACOSS. (2001a). *ACOSS submission to the Independent Review of breaches and penalties in the Social Security system*, [Electronic Submission to Government]. Australian Council Of Social Services. Available: <http://www.acoss.org.au/intro/2001/316b.htm> [17<sup>th</sup> December, 2001].
- ACOSS. (2001b). *Breaching the safety net: The harsh impact of social security penalties*, [Press Release]. Australian Council of Social Service. Available: <http://www.acoss.org.au/info/2001/info305.htm>. [13<sup>th</sup> September 2001].
- Ammon-Gaberson, K. B., & Piantanida, M. (1998). Generating results from qualitative data. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship (Image)*, 20(3), 159-161.
- Anthony, L. (2000). *Introducing a preparing for work agreement*, [Internet press release]. Dept. of Family and Community Services. Available: <http://www.facs.gov.au/internet.../836401c59/> [2001, 23<sup>rd</sup> November].
- Anthony, L. (2001). *Securing the safety net*, [Government press release]. Department of Family and Community Services. Available: <http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/MinCS.nsf/...> [2001, 14<sup>th</sup> August].
- Atkins, D. (2002). 'Bludgers' to lose benefits. *The Courier Mail*, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2002, p. 1.
- Babbie, E. R., (1995). *The practice of social research* (7th. ed.). Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing.

- Bagnall, D. (1999). The state of welfare. *The Bulletin*, July 13th, pp. 47-49.
- Blaikie, N. (1993). *Approaches to Social Enquiry*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Boreham, P., & Hall, R. (1993). Work, employment and labour in Australian society. In J. M. Najman & J. S. Wesren (Eds.), *A Sociology of Australian Society: Introductory readings*. (2nd ed., pp. 274-310). South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia.
- Borland, J. (2000). *Unemployment*. Paper presented at the 7th National Conference on Unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown, 30<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- Bridgman, P., & Davis, G. (2000). *The Australian Policy Handbook* (2nd ed.). St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Bronson, D., & Rousseau, S. (1996). *Globalisation and workers' human rights in the APEC region* (Occasional papers 9). Quebec: The International Centre for Human rights and Democratic Development.
- Brough, M. (2001). Job figures are out in the open. *Courier Mail*, March 5<sup>th</sup>, p. 13.
- Bryson, L. (1993). Welfare issues of the nineties. In J. M. Najman & J. S. Western (Eds.), *A Sociology of Australian Society: Introductory readings*. (pp. 463-494). South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia.
- Burgess, J., Mitchell, W. F., O'Brien, D. J., & Watts, M. J. (1998). *Workfare in Australia and New Zealand: A critical assessment*. Paper presented at the 5th National Conference on Unemployment, RMIT, Melbourne, October.
- Burgess, J., Mitchell, W. F., O'Brien, D. J., & Watts, M.J. (2000). The developing workfare policy in Australia: a critical assessment. *The Journal of Socio-economics*, 29, pp.173-188.
- Burns, R. B. (1990). *Introduction to research methods in education*. Sydney: Longman Cheshire.
- Carson, E., & Kerr, L. (2001). "Bust for the 'baby-boomers': the real mid-life crisis". Paper presented at the 8th National Unemployment Conference (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW, 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Castles, F. G. (2001). A farewell to the Australian welfare state. *Eureka Street*, 11, January-February.
- Caulley, D. N. (1992). *Overview of approaches to program evaluation: Paper presented at conference*. Paper presented at the Program Evaluation in the Public Sector, LaTrobe University, Sydney.
- Centrelink. (2001a). *Activity test penalties*, [Government Web Page]. Centrelink. Available: [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/newstart\\_activity\\_pen.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/newstart_activity_pen.htm) [20/06/01].
- Centrelink. (2001b). Interviews...why should you turn up? *Employment Update*, 1., December.
- Centrelink. (2002). *Psychologists: 80 Opportunities Nationwide* (pp. 32). Brisbane: The Courier Mail Classified Advertising.
- Clarke, F. (1998). *The big history question: Snapshots of Australian history*. East Roseville NSW: Kangaroo Press.

- Cole, M. (2002). Welfare cheats star on Centrelink video. *The Courier Mail*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, p. 4.
- DFACS. (2000). *Participation support for a more equitable society. Final (McLure) report, July 2000* (Welfare reform report). Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services.
- Donald, J. (2000). *Social policy - from support to enabling*. Paper presented at the Australian Political Studies Association 2000 Annual Conference, ANU, Canberra., 3-6 October.
- Dullroy, J. (2002). Confess, dole cheats urged. *The Courier Mail*, May 20<sup>th</sup>, p. 2.
- Eardley, T. (1998). *Working but poor: Low pay and poverty in Australia*. Paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Unemployment, RMIT, Melbourne. October.
- Editorial. (1999). Jobs the only real welfare reform. *The Courier Mail*, Thursday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, p. 12.
- Editorial. (2002). Getting over the jobless stigma. *The Courier Mail*, May 20<sup>th</sup>, p. 10.
- Edwards, M., Howard, C., & Miller, R. (2001). *Social policy, public policy: From problem to practice*. Crows Nest NSW: Allen and Unwin.
- Eldridge, D. (2001). *Summary report from the Prime Minister's youth pathways action plan taskforce 2001*, [Government research report]. Department of Prime Minister. (May 22<sup>nd</sup>) Available: <http://www.youthpathways.gov.au/report.htm> [23rd November 2001].
- Giddens, A. (1998). *The Third Way: The renewal of Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilmour, J., Hartman, Y., & Jennings, L. (2000). *Challenging capacity - Can the government meet its Mutual Obligation*. Paper presented at the 7th National Conference on Unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown., 30th November-1 December.
- Goodin, R., Heady, B., Muffels, R., & Dirven, H.-J. (1999). *The real worlds of welfare capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodin, R. E. (2001). False principles of welfare reform. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 36(No.3), pp. 189- 205.
- Graetz, B., & McAllister, I. (1988). *Dimensions of Australian Society*. South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia P/L.
- Hall, S. (1998). *Outcomes for participants in 'Work for the Dole' schemes: A view from both sides*. Unpublished Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) Thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- Hammer, S. (2002). *The ideal of Liberal independence and the decline of the welfare state*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, (forthcoming).
- Hammersley, M. (1990). *Reading ethnographic research: A critical Guide*. London: Longmans.
- Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's wrong with ethnography: Methodological Explorations*. London: Routledge.
- Hannon, K. (2002). Fines for Job Network. *The Courier Mail*, 29<sup>th</sup> January, p. 4.
- Harris, J. (1998). Scientific management, bureau-professionalism, new managerialism: The labour process of state social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 28, pp.839-862.

- Hartman, Y. (2001). *Precarious stability. Jobless families in the new millenium*. Paper presented at the 8th National Unemployment Conference (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September
- Hazlehurst, K. M., & Braithwaite, J. (1993). Crime in Australia. In J. M. Najman & J. S. Western (Eds.), *A sociology of Australian society: Introductory readings* (second ed., pp. 369-401). South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia.
- Held, D. (1995). *Democracy and the global order: From the modern state to cosmopolitan governance*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Horan, A. (2001). *Charities target welfare penalties*, [Media release]. Smith Family Organisation. Available: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0108/20/national/national13.html> [17th December, 2001].
- Howard, J. (1999). *Address to the 'Australia Unlimited Roundtable' Building a stronger and fairer Australia: Liberalisation in economic policy and modern conservatism in social policy*. Paper presented at the Australia Unlimited Roundtable, Canberra., May 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Hutchings, K. (1998). Basic Concepts and Globalisation. In N. Ryan (Ed.), *Government, business & society* (pp. 9-25 and 225 -250). Sydney: Prentice Hall.
- Jackman, C. (2002). 'Work for Dole' net to widen. *Sunday Mail*, February 3<sup>rd</sup> p. 5.
- Jennings, L. (2001). *Make work pay*. Paper presented at the 8th National Unemployment Conference (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Johnstone, C. (2001). Budget 2001: Poll position. *The Courier Mail*, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, pp. 25-26.
- Jones, A., & May, J. (1998). *Working in Human Service Organisations*. South Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman Australia.
- Kinnear, P. (2000). Mutual obligation: Ethical and social implications; Discussion Paper (pp. 1-46). Canberra: The Australia Institute.
- Langmore, J., & Quiggin, J. (1994). *Work for all: Full employment in the nineties*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press.
- Lauritsen, J. (2001). *The Danish model of activation*. Paper presented at the 8th National Conference on unemployment (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Lawrence, C. (2002). *The brave new world of mutual obligation*, [Internet press release]. Available: <http://www.carmenlawrence.com/says/papers/mutual.htm> [March 10th 2002].
- MacDonald, H., & Abello, D. (2001). *How is the Job Network impacting on the operations and orientations of community-based non-profit agencies?* Paper presented at the 8th National Unemployment Conference (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Madigan, M. (2002). Billions in black money on hitlist. *The Courier Mail*, March 12<sup>th</sup>, p. 8.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G., B. (1989). *Designing qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA.: SAGE Publications.

- McKenna, M. (1999). Howard's Welfare: Tough love. *The Courier Mail*, 11<sup>th</sup> November, p. 11.
- McKinnon, M., & Dorries, B. (1999). Jobless happy to work for less. *The Courier Mail*, April 13<sup>th</sup>, p. 4.
- McLeod, R. (2001). *Commonwealth Ombudsman's Annual Report for the year ended 30th June 2001*, [Government Report]. Commonwealth Ombudsman [17th December 2001], Canberra.
- Merton, R. K. (1936). The unanticipated consequences of purposive social action. *American Sociological Review*, 1(No 1), pp. 894-904.
- Mitchell, W. F. (2000). *Full employment abandoned - the role of the public sector*. Paper presented at the 7th National Conference on Unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown., 30<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- Morgan, R. R. (2000). *Community attitudes towards unemployed people of workforce age. Report Summary*. (Commissioned Survey Summary Report). Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS).
- Moscaritolo, M., & Keim, T. (2001). Tough welfare rules review. *Courier Mail*, August 13<sup>th</sup>, p. 1.
- Moses, J., & Sharples, I. (2000). *Breaching - History, trends and issues*. Paper presented at the 7th National Conference on Unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown., 30<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (3rd. ed.). Needham Heights, MA.: Allyn & Bacon.
- Nevile, A. (2001). *State of the Family 2001* (Social welfare report). Melbourne: Anglicare Australia.
- Newman, J. (2000). *The challenge of welfare dependency in the 21st century*, [Discussion Paper]. Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. Available: <http://www.workright.org.au/archive/welfare%20reform.html> [11/05/2000].
- Nolan, R. (1997). Compliance and control in the Newstart Program. In J. Tomlinson, W. Patton, P. Creed, & R. Hicks (Eds.), *Unemployment policy and practice* (pp. 185-201). Brisbane: Australian Academic Press.
- Odgers, R. (2001). Thousands reject training for jobs. *Courier Mail*, April 11<sup>th</sup>, pp. 8.
- Parnell, S. (2002). Anderson hits 'un-Australian' work shirkers. *The Courier Mail*, May 21<sup>st</sup>, p. 2.
- Pearce, D., Disney, J., & Ridout, H. (2002). *Report of the review of breaches and penalties in the Social Security system*, [Internet Press Release]. Combined commission of ACOSS, and Community Charity Organisations. Available: [http://www.breachreview.org/final\\_report/summaryreportword.doc](http://www.breachreview.org/final_report/summaryreportword.doc) [11th March 2002].
- Pearse, V. (2000). *Welfare to work for parents - the parenting payment intervention pilot*. Paper presented at the 7th National Conference on Unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown., 30<sup>th</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> December.

- Quiggin, J. (2001). *Active labour market policy as an automatic stabiliser*. Paper presented at the 8th National Conference on Unemployment (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Raper, M. (2001). *Independent group to conduct review of social security penalties*, [Electronic press release]. ACOSS. Available: <http://www.acoss.org.au/review.htm> [29/01/2002].
- Rees, S. (2000). Omissions in the twentieth century - priorities in the twenty-first. In S. Rees & S. Wright (Eds.), *Human rights, corporate responsibility: A dialogue*. Annandale: Pluto.
- Richardson, L. L. (2000). *Impact of the mutual obligation initiative on the exit behaviour of unemployment benefit recipients: The threat of additional activities*. Paper presented at the 7th National Conference on Unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown., 30<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- Rollason, R. (2001). *"Punish first" approach to welfare too costly*, [Press release]. Anglicare Australia. Available: [www.anglicare.asn.au/](http://www.anglicare.asn.au/) [March 22nd, 2001].
- Sawer, H. (2000). *'One fundamental value': Participants' views on work for the dole*. Paper presented at the 7th National Conference on unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown., 30<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- Sleep, L. (2001). *Pulling up their breaches: An analysis of Centrelink breach numbers and formal appeal rates?* Paper presented at the 8th National Unemployment Conference (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Smith, J. P. (1993). *Taxing popularity: The story of taxation in Australia*. Canberra: Federalism Research Centre, Australian National University.
- Stavropoulos, P. (2000). *Australians living on the edge: New report slams government welfare policy*, [Press Release]. World Socialist Web Site. Available: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/nov2000/welf-n02.shtml> [16th November 2000].
- Stilwell, F. (1993). Economic rationalism: Sound foundations for policy? In S. Rees, G. Rodley, & F. Stilwell (Eds.), *Beyond the market: Alternatives to economic rationalism* (pp. 27-37). Leichhardt, NSW.: Pluto Press Australia.
- Strange, S. (1996). The declining authority of States, *The retreat from the state: the diffusion of power in the world economy* (pp. 3-15). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Titmuss, R. (2000). Universalism versus selection. In C. Pierson & F. G. Castles (Eds.), *The welfare state reader* (pp. 42- 50). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tomlinson, J. (1999). *Discussing "welfare dependency"*. Submission to Senator Newman's Welfare Inquiry, 14th November 1999. Queensland University of Technology. Unpublished.
- Tomlinson, J. (2001). *Income support for unemployed people: Human rights versus utilitarian rights*. Paper presented at the 8th National Unemployment Conference (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September.

- van Parijs, P. (2000). Basic income and the two dilemmas of the welfare state. In C. Pierson & F. G. Castles (Eds.), *The welfare state reader* (pp. 355-359). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Vanstone, A. (2002a). *Breaching rules change to protect the vulnerable*, [Internet Media Release]. Department of Family and Community Services. Available: [http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/minfacts.nsf/\[06/03/2002\]](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/minfacts.nsf/[06/03/2002]).
- Vanstone, A. (2002b). *Data matching saves taxpayers \$550 million*, [Electronic Media Release]. Department of Family and Community Services. 8<sup>th</sup> Jan. Available: [http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/mint.../96/\[16/01/2002\]](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/mint.../96/[16/01/2002]).
- Vanstone, A., & Abbott, T. (2001). *Australians working together - Helping people to move forward*, [Government Ministerial Statement]. Available: [http://www.together.gov.au/PDFs/budget\\_statement.pdf](http://www.together.gov.au/PDFs/budget_statement.pdf) [23/11/2001].
- von Hayek, F. (2000). The meaning of the welfare state. In C. Pierson & F. G. Castles (Eds.), *The welfare state reader* (pp. 90 - 95). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wallis, T. G. (2000). *Activity test evaluation - Customer survey*, [Departmental Internet Publication]. Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS). Available: [http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/wallis/\\$file/summary.pdf](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/wallis/$file/summary.pdf) [05/03/2002].
- Watts, M. (2001). *Basic income versus the job guarantee: A review of the issues*. Paper presented at the 8th National Unemployment Conference (Virtual), Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW., 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Weisberg, H. F., Krosnick, J. A., & Bowen, B. D. (1996). *An introduction to survey research, polling, and data analysis* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Wilson, B. (2002). Boom Town: Soaring urban land valuations have confirmed the heat in the Brisbane residential property market. *The Courier Mail*, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, p. 27.
- Windschuttle, K. (1980). *Unemployment: A social and political analysis of the economic crisis in Australia* (2nd Edition ed.). Ringwood, Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia.