

Productivity Commission: Inquiry into Carer leave

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Carer Leave inquiry. I have undertaken various research projects examining the impacts of social security on unpaid care. I also worked on the United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment in 2017/2018.

For this inquiry, I draw on two research projects that both identify serious issues with punitive social security for unpaid care. I attach both studies as peer reviewed and published papers for your reference, and include a short description of the findings below.

Overall, both research projects reflect how welfare conditionality and low social security rates impact negatively on unpaid care work. Federal government policies claim to incentivise work through welfare conditionality, however my research suggests that these programs make unpaid care work harder. **Welfare conditionality is premised on an assumption that reproductive labour is not work—indeed, this is a structuring principle of welfare conditionality as it overlooks and undervalues the gendered division of labour resulting in discarding the amount of labour that unpaid carers engage in on a daily basis by deeming them unemployed and not working.**

In my research, unpaid care is not just unpaid childcare, but also includes caring roles for people in the community and extended families. Some interviewees were home schooling their children, looking after family members and doing voluntary work caring for women in domestic violence situations – such as running voluntary support groups, and volunteering. My research also exposes how understandings of care have centred around colonial and settler notions of care which overlook First Nations meanings and practices of care.

Appendix 1:

This paper examined what happened for women subjected to welfare conditionality when the government provided the \$550 Coronavirus supplement and suspended welfare conditionality during COVID-19. These temporary measures of 2021 provided a 'natural experiment' where the government gave people often deemed as needing to be compelled into the labour market, adequate financial security and no welfare conditionalities. The study's findings suggest an alternative approach to welfare conditionality, and one where unpaid carers were better able to thrive (See Klein et al. 2021).

Appendix 2:

This project used interview data of women compulsorily placed onto ParentsNext (a compulsory welfare conditionality program) to understand not only their experiences of ParentsNext, but illicit an understanding as how these experiences reinforce and produce related inequalities. This research draws on semi-structured interviews with 15 single mothers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) compulsorily placed on the ParentsNext from various ParentsNext locations across Victoria and Western Australia including both intensive and targeted streams. The research did not aim to be a representative sample, however through giving insights into the challenges raised by women, a deeper understanding of the impacts of ParentsNext emerged,

including how welfare conditionality creates difficulties for people undertaking unpaid care (See Klein 2021).

Recommendations

1. Abolish all welfare conditionality programs, including mutual obligations and compulsory income management.
2. Increase Jobseeker to an adequate rate (at least back to levels which included the \$550 Coronavirus supplement)
3. Develop a participant led, voluntary and supportive program that helps women engage in the labour force when they are ready and able.
4. Redefine policy definitions of work to include the vast range of productive (yet often unpaid) work including childcare, elderly care, care of country, and other community work.

Sincerely,

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References

- Klein, E. (2021), Unpaid care, welfare conditionality and expropriation. Gender Work Organ. Accepted Author Manuscript. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12679>
- Klein, E, Cook, K, Maury, M & Bowey, K 2021, Social security and time use during COVID-19, Swinburne University of Technology & Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, <https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Social-security-and-time-use-during-COVID-19-Report-Treating-Families-Fairly-2021.pdf>