

# NZCPR Weekly

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NEW ZEALAND CENTRE FOR POLITICAL RESEARCH

## RESTORING FATHERHOOD

Dr Muriel Newman

“10,000 march against violent crime”. “Mayor wants gangs crushed by army”. “75 percent of children bullied at school”. “Toddler in Starship Hospital with critical head injuries”. These recent newspaper headlines highlight the deep-seated social crisis New Zealand is facing.

It is the ugly side of our country: children being brutalised and killed by adults who should be protecting them; escalating levels of bullying in schools; hordes of disorderly youths causing mayhem on the streets; gangs in control of a lucrative drug trade that has infiltrated deep into communities all around the country. These are problems that are now so serious they cannot be ignored.

The reality is that increasing violence is destroying lives on a daily basis. Hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money is being spent on mopping up the damage with massive human resources needed for front-line crisis work. Endless minds are also engaged in devising strategies to deal with the problems, but while many well-meaning people come up with many well-meaning 'solutions', few if any are prepared to deal with the real root cause of this social crisis.

The fact is that endless studies from around the world show that virtually every major social pathology we face can be linked back to the breakdown of the family: violent crime, drugs and alcohol abuse, truancy, unwed pregnancy, suicide, psychological disorders these all correlate more strongly to the absence of a biological married father in the home than with any other single factor.

The majority of prisoners, juvenile detention inmates, high school dropouts, pregnant teenagers, adolescent murderers, and rapists come from fatherless homes. The connection between single-parent households and crime is so strong that controlling for this factor erases the relationship between race and crime as well as between low income and crime.

New Zealand's Principal Youth Court Judge, Andrew Becroft, recently released figures from a study of youth crime that confirms that the majority of serious youth offenders a staggering 82 percent - have lost contact with their father: only 12 percent of the offenders who came through the court were living with both parents, 28 percent were living with one parent (usually their mother) and 60 percent were not living with either their mother or their father.

That is clearly not to say that every child being raised without a dad ends up in trouble, or that every child raised by a married couple does well, but on the balance of probability, children raised without their natural father, will face greater

difficulties in life, than children brought up with their dad to love, guide and protect them.

Fathers play a vital role in bringing up their children. From the rough and tumble play with toddlers, to the crucial task of setting boundaries, enforcing discipline and challenging children to accept responsibilities and become more independent, a father's influence is crucial. It is especially the case in the socialisation of teenage children, where a father will provide a role model of what men are supposed to be like on the job, in the home, with women, and with children.

Judge Becroft has described the deep-seated need that boys have for a father figure in this way: “14, 15, and 16 year-old boys seek out role models like 'heat seeking missiles'. It's either the leader of the Mongrel Mob or it's a sports coach or it's Dad. But an overwhelming majority of boys who I see in the Youth Court have lost contact with their father. ... What I'm saying is that I'm dealing in the Youth Court with boys for whom their Dad is simply not there, never has been, gone, vanished and disappeared”.

It is this collapse of fatherhood that is at the heart of New Zealand's social crisis. There are now hundreds of thousands of New Zealand children growing up in fatherless homes. Too many live in crime-ridden neighborhoods where violence is the norm, where alcohol and drug abuse are commonplace, and where disaffected dropouts roam the streets instead of being meaningfully engaged in school.

According to Judge Becroft an astonishing 80 percent of teenage offenders who go through the youth court have drug or alcohol problems and a staggering 70 percent aren't enrolled in any form of education!

This crisis is of the government's own making. While the seeds of family disintegration were sown by the Labour Government in the seventies - with policies designed to progress the feminists' goal of independence for women - successive National governments allowed the situation to get worse.

At the core of the problem is the Domestic Purposes Benefit. Labour introduced the DPB in order to provide unhappy mothers with an alternative to a husband. The DPB gave an unconditional state guaranteed welfare benefit to any woman who wanted to raise a child on her own. Over the years the DPB has become a way of life for hundreds of thousands of women and their children. Many of these are now caught up in a cycle of intergenerational welfare dependency to become part of New Zealand's growing dysfunctional underclass.

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This week's NZCPR Guest Commentator is renowned author and commentator Bob Jones. In his opinion piece Homo Degeratus, Bob describes - in his forthright way - how a "welfare-sated under-class ... is now thriving in New Zealand; slobbering, tattooed, illiterate, pig-ignorant, prolific breeding, drug-infested, alcoholic, welfare dependent, murdering and robbing, barbaric filth and it is all traceable solely to welfare excess and the DPB in particular. I for one have had enough. Disproportionately Maori, their existence is a disgrace, not to Maoridom but to the human race".

Bob echoes the despair of many New Zealanders when he states: "I sense and personally feel, a widespread sense of hopelessness about the current state of affairs. The solution lies with our politicians but what odds on a set of political circumstances which would throw up another Douglas to embark on a radical social reform as Roger did on the economic front?"

He explains, "Ironically, when I write that the solution lies with politicians I could just as easily say that the problem stems from them. Primarily motivated by the pursuit of power, once in office the record shows that politicians driving modus operandi is not to rock the boat". To read Homo Degeratus, see [www.nzcpr.com](http://www.nzcpr.com).

Bob is right, of course. It is difficult to find any political will to reform the welfare system in general and the DPB in particular - even though the politicians are well aware that children are the major victims of a system that is supposed to protect them.

No other country has a benefit payment that is as unconstrained as New Zealand's Domestic Purposes Benefit. As Bob Jones mentions in his article, when the US realised the damage to children and society - that was being caused by their equivalent of the DPB, President Clinton abolished it. He replaced it with a system that prioritised getting mothers off benefits and back into the workforce. Independence from the state was seen as the key goal. And in spite of a plethora of dire predictions about the consequences, the results have been very positive for all concerned.

New Zealand desperately needs politicians with the

courage to do what is right for the country and replace the DPB with a system of temporary support based on work - similar to that found in many other developed countries. Hardship payments should be available for deserted or mistreated spouses, and the parents of teenagers should realise that the responsibility for supporting their teenager to have children of their own, will largely fall on their shoulders.

Most importantly, it should be signalled loud and clear that it is simply no longer acceptable to bear children if they are not going to be properly raised and supported. Children need a mother and a father who will love, nurture and support them, if they are to have the best opportunity at leading a successful and fulfilling life. That means encouraging marriage, since, despite its intrinsic faults, marriage still remains the bedrock institution of civil society providing the glue that binds mothers and fathers together for the common purpose of raising their children well.

Of course, much more needs to be done to support those parents with children who are presently running amuck: special schools with live-in facilities to give these children the routines and boundaries that they may be missing in their home-life may have a place. More than anything, the priority must be connecting these children with the education system, because no matter how bad a child's home-life may be, an education can give them a life-line to a better future.

There is also much that needs to be done to fight the growing crime and violence within our society but that is another subject for another day.

While none of this is simple, what we categorically know is that if we carry on as we have in the past, we will end up with a future that is far more violent and problematic than the one we face today. Doing nothing is not an option.

New Zealand urgently needs political leadership in the area of welfare reform. The DPB needs to be replaced as a priority and fatherhood needs to be restored. It is time the political parties stepped up to this challenge.

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