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Like other liberal-welfare states, Canada, in a climate of balanced budgets and deficit reduction, has been active in developing policies intended to move welfare recipients into employment in order to achieve self-sufficiency. The purpose of this paper is to employ a critical feminist analysis to examine the extent to which these policies, developed under the ideological umbrella of neo-liberalism, are gender sensitive. Literature on the economic and non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work policies is reviewed to evaluate whether these initiatives, while mandating lone-mothers into employment, recognize the gendered nature of work, employment and poverty. Gaps in current research are identified and questions are posed about the implications of welfare-to-work on the citizenship entitlements of low-income lone mothers.

Key words: citizenship, gender, lone mothers, welfare-to-work

The 1990s signaled a dramatic change in how Canada addresses income security. The trend in Canada, as in several other liberal-welfare states, has been to approach welfare reform through a market-oriented approach known as welfare-to-work. According to this approach, welfare recipients who are deemed employable by government receive benefits only if they are taking steps towards gainful employment through participating in employability programs, attending school, or actively engaging in job-search activities (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998). Although welfare-to-work programs have existed in Canada in one form or another
since the 1970s, there was a "seismic shift" in the expansion of these programs in the 1990s (Peck, 2001). The Province of Alberta, for instance, began a process of revamping its social welfare system through developing regulations to restrict eligibility and financial support for welfare recipients and mandating welfare recipients into job training programs (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998; Vosko, 1999).

The introduction of welfare-to-work policies in Canada is but one indication of a neo-liberal shift which is moving Canada from a model of social citizenship, where all citizens are entitled to a base level of benefits, to a model of market citizenship, where citizenship entitlement is contingent upon a person's attachment to the labour market (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1997). This shift in citizenship entitlements could have significant consequences for low-income lone mothers, given that women have different labour-market experiences than men which are further exacerbated for lone mothers due to difficult labour-market realities and a greater burden of unpaid caring work (Mason, 2003). Baker and Tippin (1999) state that "gendering the concept of employability... requires acknowledgement that drawing low-income people into paid work may have different consequences for them, depending on their gender (as well as social class and culture)" (p. 263). If welfare-to-work employability initiatives—while encouraging lone-mothers into employment—fail to recognize the realities of the labour market for low-income women, as well as the caring work that mothers do, they will be unresponsive to the realities of women's lives and therefore ineffective.

In this paper, I utilize a critical feminist approach to examine the development of Canadian welfare-to-work policies within the influential, if often unseen, ideological umbrella of neo-liberalism, deconstructing the concepts of gender equality, dependency and self-sufficiency as they are understood in current welfare-to-work initiatives. Reviewing literature on the economic and non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work policies, I evaluate the extent to which these policies, while mandating lone-mothers into employment, recognize the gendered nature of work, employment and poverty. Identifying gaps in current research, I then pose some questions about the implications of welfare-to-work on the citizenship entitlements of low-income lone mothers.
Critical Feminist Theoretical Framework

Where critical theory may be understood as a critical analysis of social institutions in order to illuminate the structure of domination and oppression (Fay, 1987), feminist theory may be thought of as "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (Gordon, 1979, p. 107). Critical feminist theory is an amalgam of these two theories, seeking to reveal structural oppression, transform systems, and emancipate oppressed individuals, using gender as a key category of analysis. By making visible previously invisible female experiences, critical feminist theorists work to correct "both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Showing the connection between individual experiences and societal contexts, critical feminists theorize issues such as poverty to emphasize structural explanations over individualistic explanations of particular phenomena. A critical feminist theoretical approach thus offers an opportunity to examine the connection between structural oppression and the individual experiences of women (Bloom, 1998). Specifically, it serves as an important theoretical lens for researching the impact of welfare-to-work policies on the lives of families in poverty, with its focus on the importance of personal experience and the emancipation of particular groups of people from elements of society that are oppressive.

The Canadian Social Policy Context

Within the Canadian federalist system, provincial governments have jurisdiction over health, education and social services. However, the federal government provides substantial funding for these programs, with the condition that provinces adhere to federal guidelines (Baker & Tippin, 1999). The mix of policies in Canada is best described as a hybrid of universal and targeted programs, reflecting elements of European social-democratic states on the one hand, and U.S. style market individualism on the other (Peck, 2001). Generally, social programs unrelated to labour-market protection are universal or quasi-universal and include healthcare benefits for physician and hospital care, elementary and secondary education, old age security, and the Canada Child
Tax Benefit. In contrast, programs designed to protect citizens from labour-market failures are more reflective of U.S. targeted and means-tested programs (Noel, 1995: Peck, 2001). Social assistance benefits, for example, are provided through a means-tested eligibility program. Families and individual adults may be eligible for social-assistance benefits, although individuals receive significantly fewer benefits than parents and their children, privileging families over individual claimants. Employment insurance (EI) is offered through a national, public contributory program to all employees, but tightened eligibility requirements and cutbacks in the 1990s have made it more difficult for an increasing number of employees to claim benefits (Baker & Tippin, 1999).

Although social-assistance benefits have always been targeted in Canada, fundamental changes in federal legislation created an opportunity for a watershed of change to its administration. Prior to 1996, the Canadian federal government distributed monies to provinces through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) with the goals of preventing poverty and providing assistance to citizens in need (Armstrong, 1997). Importantly, CAP specified that social assistance be provided without work requirements. In 1996, however, CAP was replaced with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), which provided block-funding from the federal government to the provinces for health, social services and post-secondary education, giving provinces increased discretionary power about how to prioritize spending, and removing the requirement that social assistance be provided without strings. Consequently, provinces began to enact welfare-to-work policies, fundamentally altering the previous notion that welfare was a rights' based program (Armstrong, 1997). This shift was influenced by the global ideological winds of neo-liberalism.

The Ideological Context of Welfare-to-Work

*Neo-liberalism*

Neo-liberalism, rooted in classic 19th century liberalism, is characterized by its focus on the primacy of the market, individualism, small government and de-regulation (O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999; Teeple, 2000). Central to neo-liberalism
is the concept of economic rationalism, which emphasizes deficit reduction, cost-effectiveness and government efficiency, and de-emphasizes increased government services and poverty reduction (Baker & Tippin, 1999). Given its emphasis on privatization and government downsizing to achieve these ends, the neo-liberal agenda has had important implications for the restructuring of welfare programs, and has been used to justify welfare-to-work trends. A neo-liberal agenda works to convince citizens that the main role of the state is fiscal responsibility, not the provision of a social safety net. As McDaniel (2002) states, “Attempts by civil society or citizens to assert social rights or the public interest are recodified as against progress” (p. 131).

The complex matrix of reasons for the development of neo-liberalism is beyond the scope of this discussion. Stated simply, however, the rise of neo-liberalism occurred in many industrialized nations in the 1980s, including Canada, due to the emergence of the global economy evidenced by the internationalization of capital and the proliferation of trans-national companies, coupled with rising national deficits and declining national growth (Teeple, 2000). The gloomy economic landscape of Canada during this time period led to increased unemployment, and subsequent burgeoning usage of social welfare programs. The costs of these programs thus began to escalate (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Pulkingham & Ternowetsky, 1996; Vosko, 1999). In such a climate, governments increasingly blamed welfare recipients for rising public expenditures (Klein & Montgomery, 2001; Peck, 2001; Shragge, 1997). Critics of the welfare-to-work trend argue, however, that the claims that welfare recipients were responsible for the economic crisis are unfounded, given that social welfare expenditures were just six percent of the federal debt (Pulkingham & Ternowetsky, 1996). Rather, they suggest that the welfare-to-work bandwagon has more to do with the persuasive ideology of neo-liberalism than impending financial calamity (Piven & Cloward 2001).

Neo-liberalism has dominated the discourse on how to address income security and has led to a shift in the conceptualization of citizenship entitlements (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1997). According to this approach, market limitations must direct the provision of income assistance, and social benefits are viewed
as a privilege rather than a right. Welfare is more likely to be understood as a contingent and temporary benefit to sustain a person until s/he can obtain self-sufficiency through employment. The result is that economic security for citizens is increasingly reliant upon an individual’s attachment to the labour force. The requirement to be attached to the labour market in order to have any kind of income security is called market citizenship, and suggests a significant departure from a more inclusive notion of citizenship, otherwise known as social citizenship (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1997).

Under the umbrella of market citizenship, employment is equated with independence and independence is increasingly associated with worthy citizenship (Baker & Tippin, 1999). The shift to market citizenship has significant implications for those who are not attached to the labour force at all, or whose attachment is precarious at best. Low-income lone mothers are particularly at risk because their labour-market attachment is unstable and low-paying. Furthermore, the juncture at which unpaid caring work and paid employment meet may be even more difficult to negotiate for low-income lone mothers than for middle-class employed mothers due to decreased access to financial and non-financial resources and increased demands, making it challenging for them to sustain employment.

Gender equality

Perhaps one of the most contentious words in policy development is the term “equality.” Contemporary policy discourse tends to understand gender equality as gender neutrality (O’Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999). Although the notion of gender equality is upheld, this understanding of equality is based on the presumption of sameness in the economic and caring aspects of the family. In other words, men and women are assumed to contribute equally to the family purse and the childcare and household responsibilities within the family. Importantly, the logical outcome of this assumption is that a single parent is equally as capable as a two-parent family in providing economic and caring needs for the family. Clearly, this is not the case. Significant inequalities exist in the economic opportunities of women and men where women are significantly disadvantaged (McDaniel, 2002). Furthermore,
women engage in more caring work than men, especially in relation to the care of dependent children or aging parents.

Today, most feminists, while acknowledging the importance of "equality as sameness" in particular instances, argue that to treat people equally does not always mean treating them the same (Eichler, 1997). Equality discourse in this sense recognizes that people experience different structural barriers based on race, class, gender, age, and sexual orientation, and accommodates those differences. In the context of welfare-to-work initiatives, a feminist discourse on equality highlights the reality that women experience the labour force differently from men due to the pink ghetto of female labour and the greater childcare and other caring responsibilities that women engage in. That this is not factored into welfare-to-work policy initiatives will have a substantially negative impact for lone mothers.

Dependency

Within neo-liberal society, welfare dependency is seen as the trap entangling welfare recipients. Dependency, in most situations, is not considered to be a desirable status, but rather one that is indicative of shortcomings which should be addressed. Even in situations where dependency is accepted, such as the dependence of a child, the goal is to move the individual—in this case, the child—into a state of independence. The conceptualization of dependency as negative, and welfare recipients as dependent, is critical in the ideological play to blame impoverished individuals for the failings of the market economy. Through individualizing dependency—making it the responsibility of the individual in poverty—society is able to abdicate responsibility for lone mothers in poverty.

Various authors have discussed the multitude of paradoxes that exist in relation to notions of dependency (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; O'Connor, 1996; Robertson, 1998). In an historical analysis on the concept of dependency, Fraser and Gordon (1994) argue that the social construction of dependency ties in significantly to the development of understandings about acceptable and unacceptable dependency. Fraser and Gordon point out that while dependency was once understood within a social context where few people had independence and
power due to a lack of legal, political, social and economic rights, dependency in industrial and postindustrial times was and is understood within a different context. Within modern day western societies, citizens are perceived to have equal access to legal, political, social and economic rights. Therefore, most individuals perceived as dependent within this society are considered flawed (Fraser & Gordon 1994). The meaning of dependency has thus become individualized.

In debating welfare reform, fascinating, contradictory notions of dependency arise. The most striking contradiction is that although some welfare states encourage middle-class women to be “stay at home” moms and dependent on their husbands for financial sustenance, they simultaneously require low-income lone mothers to work for wages and pay someone else to care for their children. Thus, while “stay at home” mothers with male breadwinners are saluted for their outstanding “family values,” poor women who wish to raise their children full-time are declared lazy and psychologically dependent on the state. Another contradiction in the rhetoric on dependency is that male breadwinners are considered independent despite their considerable reliance on women to care for them, their children, and their homes (Baker & Tippin, 1999). Although there are various ways to reconceptualize understandings of dependency, within the welfare reform environment policies clearly indicate that financial dependency upon the state is negative, and financial independence is positive. The stigma attached to being dependent on the state further marginalizes lone mothers who rely on income assistance.

**Self Sufficiency**

If dependency is the trap, self-sufficiency is the trapdoor, intended to free individuals from their dependent status. Within current welfare reform initiatives in Canada, self-sufficiency is a clear policy goal. If a person is dependent, the logical solution is to lead him or her along the path to self-sufficiency. For example, an early policy document from the Government of Alberta stated that the social assistance program, Supports for Independence (SFI) would “provide support which promotes independence—financial independence for those who are able to work” (Alberta Family and Social Services, 1990, p. 5). Surprisingly, although self-sufficiency is a central concept in welfare restructuring, it is not
defined in policy documents. Rather, it is assumed that the meaning of self-sufficiency is known. To be self-sufficient, according to Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (1986), is to be “able to maintain oneself or itself without outside aid: capable of providing for one’s or its own needs” (Gove, p. 2061). This definition suggests that self-sufficiency is only attained when an individual is completely self-reliant in all ways. It has undertones of understandings about the “self-made man”—one who achieves success without any support or assistance from others. Yet, the self-made man is anything but self-made. Any successful individual achieves success within a complex matrix of support and assistance from others. This definition thus seems to fall short as it denies the inter-connectedness of individuals within families and communities.

Long (2001), an American author, has attempted to define self-sufficiency within the context of welfare reform. He formulates the definition of self-sufficiency as: “having income that is above the poverty threshold and not derived from any form of public assistance” (Long, 2001, p. 391, author’s emphasis). According to Long’s definition, then, self-sufficiency can be measured according to two components: adequate income and complete financial independence from the state. The corollary, then, is that self-sufficiency will be equivalent to employment (unless one is independently wealthy). However, this assumption is incorrect in several ways. First, if self-sufficiency is equated with employment, and it is assumed that welfare recipients are not self-sufficient, it also assumes that they do not work. Welfare recipients, however, have always engaged in paid employment, albeit intermittently (O’Connor, 2000). Additionally, paid work, even when full-time, does not guarantee an income above the poverty line, thus resulting in the increasingly familiar phenomenon of “working poor.” The notion that the absence of welfare receipt is equivalent to self-sufficiency has been proved false by much research evidence (Elton, Siepper, Azmier, & Roach, 1997; Frenette & Picot, 2003; Harris, 1996; Shragge, 1997). Long (2001) too concedes that leaving welfare is no longer a “reasonable proxy for substantially increased family self-reliance” (p. 390).

The second part of Long’s definition of self-sufficiency—that self-sufficiency entails the absence of financial support from public funds—is clearly problematic. All Canadians, like citizens of
other liberal-welfare states, receive public funds. So, according to Long’s definition of self-sufficiency, it follows that no Canadians are self-sufficient due to the provision of universal healthcare and education. Taking that argument one step further, we could make a compelling case that no-one in any liberal welfare state is self-sufficient, because middle-class and wealthy citizens benefit from many public funds, most notably tax concessions.

In summary, understandings of gender equality, dependency and self-sufficiency reflect a shift to neo-liberal understandings and market-based approaches to policy interventions. In this context, gender equality is equated with gender neutrality, and dependency upon the state is understood as a shortcoming of individuals rather than a structural problem of society. Consequently, self-sufficiency has become the Holy Grail of welfare reform, and hence the key goal of welfare restructuring. The rhetoric of achieving self-sufficiency is challenged, however, by research which examines the outcomes of welfare-to-work initiatives on lone mothers.

Impacts of Welfare-to-work Policies on Lone-Mothers

Economic Impacts

A significant body of research that looks at the patterns of welfare use and employment behaviour of current and former welfare recipients, particularly lone mothers, suggests that although welfare recipients are obtaining jobs, they are not able to survive solely on market income for more than short periods of time, and continue to live in poverty upon leaving welfare (Frenette & Picot, 2003; Gorlick & Brethour, 1998; Harris, 1996; Michalopoulos et al., 2002; Pavetti & Acs, 1997; Shillington, 1998; Vosko, 1999). Using tax data, Frenette and Picot (2003) examined the economic well-being of those leaving welfare in Canada during the 1990s. They selected persons who left welfare between 1992 and 1997, and were still off welfare two years later. Their findings show that income increased overall for welfare recipients who left the welfare rolls. Importantly, however, one-third of those leaving welfare had a substantial decrease in income, and almost 60% of the study participants were still living in poverty two years after leaving welfare. Similarly, The Self-Sufficiency
Project, a Canadian study using random assignment methodology to assess the impact of financial incentives on labour-force participation among lone parents on social assistance, found that although income increased for those in the program group, by the middle of the sixth year of the study, the use of income-assistance programs was the same in both the program and control groups (Michalopoulos et al., 2002). In other words, market income alone was not enough to keep study participants out of poverty. The questions remain as to the effectiveness of welfare-to-work programs, and the reasons why so many lone mothers return to welfare.

The answers lie in the type of work obtained by welfare recipients. Similar to U.S. findings (e.g., Cancian & Meyer, 2000; Harris, 1996), Canadian research indicates that welfare-to-work programs lead to part-time, temporary, low-paying, “precarious” jobs (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998; McFarland & Mullaly, 1996; Shillington, 1998). Moreover, most jobs that people obtain from welfare-to-work programs do not include flexibility, autonomy or benefits such as paid sick time (Vosko, 1999; Gorlick & Brethour, 1998; Shillington, 1998). Yet parents need these benefits to accommodate the needs and schedules of their children. When employment related costs such as childcare, transportation and suitable workplace clothing are incurred, the disposable income of the employees may be less than that obtained from welfare payments (Elton, Siepper, Azmier, & Roach, 1997). It is not surprising, then, that many lone mothers move from welfare to work and back to welfare again. Tellingly, Edin and Lein (1996) conclude that “working in the low-wage sector was often not compatible with parenting” (p. 263).

Non-Economic Impacts: Childcare

In examining the non-economic implications of moving lone mothers with preschool children into employment, childcare becomes a critical issue. Parents have children, and if they are required to work, they will have to find childcare for their children. Research suggests that childcare costs and availability impact the labour force participation of all women, regardless of socio-economic status (Chaykowski & Powell, 1999; White, 2001). Childcare issues become particularly critical for low-income
families, especially welfare-to-work participants, given that many parents in this transition have low-paying jobs with irregular hours. Issues of accessibility and affordability are thus paramount for this particular group of childcare seekers. Although there is a lack of literature on the intersection of welfare-to-work and childcare in Canada to date, American research shows, not surprisingly, that accessible, affordable, and quality childcare is crucial in determining whether or not a parent will be able to sustain employment after welfare (Edin, 1994; Edin & Lein, 1996; Harris, 1996; Meyers, 1997; Seccombe, Battle Waters & James, 1999). Harris (1996) found that childcare responsibilities were significant in explaining a lone mother's return to welfare after a stint of employment. The lack of access to affordable childcare was the primary barrier to maintaining employment for these women. Lone mothers on welfare favoured welfare reform if adequate supports were given for childcare (Seccombe et al., 1999). Recognizing that people leaving welfare are most likely to obtain low-paying jobs, researchers recommend comprehensive childcare subsidies to remove the childcare barrier for welfare-to-work participants.

Although childcare subsidies are important, they alone do not solve childcare challenges. In Canada, the cost of childcare for low-income families may be less significant than in the U.S. due to greater availability of daycare subsidies for low-income families. Currently, subsidies are available in Alberta to a maximum of $475.00 per month per child for families earning $31,680 per annum or less (Doherty, Friendly & Beach, 2003; Government of Alberta, 2002). However, even with full subsidies available, childcare is still reported as a barrier to employment due to a shortage of licensed daycare spots, and the fact that the average costs of daycare often exceed subsidy amounts (Doherty et al. 2003). In addition to cost barriers, inflexible childcare arrangements are significant in determining a mother's reason for not obtaining employment, or going back on welfare after working (Cook, 2000; Mason, 2003; McMullin, Davies & Cassidy, 2002). Examining why low-income families did not often utilize program-based childcare or childcare subsidies, Lowe and Weisner (2004) found that childcare centres without flexible hours prevented low-income families from accessing their services. Thus, daycare centres that
accommodate parents who work irregular shifts would potentially be more successful in meeting the needs of low-income workers. Flexible childcare arrangements become paramount in maintaining employment because low-skill jobs are more likely to involve evening and night hours, as well as rotating schedules (Meyers, 1997).

A lack of affordable and flexible childcare leads to a variety of childcare arrangements which may be unstable, unregulated and poor in quality (Elton et al., 1997; Kohen, Hertzman, & Wilms, 2002). Findings from the Self Sufficiency Project, for example, indicate that the instability of childcare arrangements for preschool children increased significantly for those in the program group (Michalopoulos et al., 2002). In other words, parents who were working 30 hours or more per week had difficulty finding stable childcare for their pre-school aged children. Henly and Lyons (2000) found that low-income parents desired childcare that was affordable, convenient and safe. Parents were most likely to find informal childcare arrangements that met the first two criteria, and sometimes the third. However, informal childcare is not available to everyone, and may be poor in quality. Unstable childcare arrangements are thus significant in determining a mother’s reason for going back on welfare (Edin, 1994; Harris, 1996). Clearly, policy which requires the labour force participation of low-income parents must look carefully at the cost, flexibility and quality of childcare programs.

American researchers have also begun to recognize the interface between childcare and health, finding that a child’s health status may lead to childcare challenges. Romero, Chavkin, Wise, Smith and Wood (2002) found that, for low-income women who tried to work in the last three years, lack of childcare was cited as a challenge to finding employment almost twice as often than for women who were currently or previously employed. Upon further examination, it was found that numerous welfare recipients could not find childcare due to the health needs of their children. Thus, the health status of children very much impacts the affordability, accessibility and quality of childcare. Although Canadian researchers have yet to examine the relationship between childcare needs and health, it is reasonable to assume that a similar situation could be found in Canada, given that
low-income Canadian children have a disproportionate number of health problems compared to middle-income children (Ross, Scott & Kelly, 1996). Despite the salience of child health status in obtaining suitable childcare, the connection between child health and childcare availability has seldom been made. Issues such as childcare, while acknowledged as a need in welfare-to-work policy development, are often underemphasized and inadequately addressed.

Gaps in the Literature

Using a gender lens to review the impacts of welfare-to-work policies on lone mothers, I have identified several gaps in the conceptual and empirical literature about welfare reform to date. First, I have suggested that welfare reform has been examined in a vacuum. A variety of social policies, including welfare-to-work initiatives, have been significantly influenced by neo-liberal assumptions about gender neutrality and the primacy of the market in decision-making. Yet most of the literature evaluating the impacts and effectiveness of welfare reform has not considered how ideology locks policy into a particular mode of development. Identifying and critiquing the ideological context within which welfare policy is created, however, provides a window in which to push policy development in another direction. Furthermore, contextualizing welfare policies within the ideological context of neo-liberalism raises fundamentally important questions about how current welfare policy directions are redefining notions of citizenship. This redefinition of citizenship could have long term consequences for all of society in increasing social inequities and decreasing social cohesion (Coburn, 2000).

Second, I have proposed that welfare-to-work policies, while claiming gender neutrality, have actually been based on an implicit understanding of gender equality which assumes gender sameness. This understanding of gender, while seemingly progressive at first glance, overlooks the differential impacts of gender which still marginalize women today. Yet because most of the literature on welfare reform does not use a gender lens to analyze the impact of policies of welfare recipients, the gendered nature of the policy gets overlooked (see Baker & Tippin, 1999; Miranne, 1998; Monroe & Tiller, 2001; O’Connor, 1996; and Seccombe et al.,
1999 for notable exceptions). Using a gender lens, policies which inherently, albeit subtly, discriminate against women in poverty could be made explicit.

Third, the non-economic impacts of welfare policy require further study. Existing research suggests that policy makers have not adequately considered how childcare might prevent low-income individuals from seeking and maintaining employment. Much more work is needed to understand the longer-term implications of welfare reform for families living in poverty.

Finally, one aspect of this analysis is glaringly obvious in its absence. That is, “researchers need to give closer consideration to beneficiaries' responses to initiatives that work to change their motivations and behaviour, rather than seeing them as passive recipients of change” (Baker & Tippin, 1999, p. 264). Indeed, little is known about the perspectives and day-to-day experiences of those who are affected by welfare-to-work initiatives. Particularly, much needs to be learned about how welfare-to-work affects the day-to-day management of work/family balance for lone mothers moving through this transition. How do welfare-to-work reforms impact the health of low-income lone mothers and their families? Where do welfare-to-work participants seek and find support? How do welfare-to-work policies affect interactions between parents and their children? Further research will need to address these questions.

Conclusion

Bashevkin (2002) posits that addressing issues pertaining to social reform “entails sifting through a veritable freight-load of ideological weights” (p. 3). Such is certainly the case when examining the development of welfare-to-work policies. Contextualizing welfare-to-work within changing notions of citizenship entitlements influenced by neo-liberal influences is particularly telling. If citizenship within contemporary Canadian society is based upon labour market attachment, what are the implications for lone mothers dependent upon the state for income? In other words, must low-income lone mothers work for pay to be considered full citizens? If so, will welfare-to-work initiatives facilitate labour-market attachment?
Research on the impacts of welfare-to-work initiatives suggests that these policies have not been effective in securing stable labour-force attachment for lone mothers. Caught in a web of neo-liberal assumptions about what it means to be self-sufficient, the failure of this set of policy initiatives is, in part, related to its inability to adequately address class and gender related issues such as the labour-market realities of low-income women and the childcare responsibilities of lone mothers. Stated succinctly, jobs in the low-wage, low-skill sector of the present market economy do not provide a living wage, nor do they entail the flexibility and autonomy needed to successfully combine paid employment and unpaid caring work. Welfare-to-work policies, as they are currently formulated, will most likely only further impoverish lone mothers and will require a substantial facelift in order to pass the litmus test of gender-sensitive social policy.

References


